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Endangered Heritage and Emergent Ogogo: A Case Study of the "Ulwazi Programme"

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ABSTRACT

Kwesukesukela, or "a long time ago," there was a beautiful woman who lived by the ocean with her husband and two small children. The woman's name was Mazanendaba. Although she lived a life full of happiness, Mazanendaba came to realize with time that something important was missing: there were no stories. No stories for mothers and grandmothers to tell their children. No stories to inspire joy and ease sorrow. No stories to enrich the mind and nurture the soul. Determined to find stories in a world without any, Mazanendaba left her beloved home in search of a new story to tell. Along the way, she met a hasty rabbit, an indignant baboon, a shy snake, a wise elephant, a proud eagle, and with time, a kind dolphin. He took her to an underworld kingdom where Mazanendaba was given a magical shell that held hundreds and thousands of stories. From that point onward, whenever a story needed to be told, Mazendaba simply held the shell to her ear and out would pour as many stories as she could ever hope for. These stories were passed down through the generations, until a South African storyteller told me. Now I am telling you.

The story of *Mazenendaba* is an enchanting and heartening tale drawn from the rich oral tradition of Africa. Since oral tradition is dependent on transmission through word of mouth, it is subject to constant change and as some would believe, struggling to survive. This research paper will examine efforts at the preservation of oral literature among heritage organizations in contemporary South Africa. It will first situate oral literature within the realm of cultural material and describe various methods of preservation by institutions and individuals. The research will then focus specifically on the Ulwazi Programme, an effort by the eThekwini Municipality to collect and catalogue indigenous knowledge among the local communities of Durban. It will describe the inner workings of the organization, highlight its digitisation and oral research efforts, and gauge attitudes towards its agenda and recent progress. Conclusions will be drawn about how effectively Ulwazi realizes its mandate and the feelings of the source community towards heritage preservation. Finally, the paper will draw upon the insights of local communities to identify their relationship with oral tradition and ascertain whether the call of Mazanendaba, all those years ago, was heeded.

INTRODUCTION

Coming forward amid a tribal ceremony to heap lavish praises upon the chief, the Xhosa *imbongi,* or praise poet, is a dominant figure in the pantheon of oral performers. He stands alongside the clan chief, who repeats the folktale of the lion, the hare, and the hyena while seated around the fire, and next to him is the Zulu *gogo,* voicing riddles, proverbs, and other wisdom-lore of old to her grandchildren.

These and other persons are the architects of "oral literature", a broad term that includes any and all verbal art transmitted by word of mouth. These are defined by the "World Oral Literature Project" as: ritual texts, curative chants, epic poems, musical genres, folk tales, creation tales, songs, myths, spells, legends, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters, word games, recitations, life histories or historical narratives."[1]

The essential feature of oral literature is its spoken transmission, or "orality." Oral literature requires utterance in order to be realized and is thus subject to the temporality of an event, locality of a place, and idiosyncrasy of a speaker. Thus, the term "oral literature" is an oxymoron, as the term "literature" is associated with material that is written or printed. Recent scholarship has introduced the term "orature" to emphasize the performance component of the genre, but for the purposes of this research, "oral literature" and "folklore" will be used to represent the body of material that has been and is conveyed vocally.

South Africa is a nation rich in oral traditions. Dating back from the original Khoi/San people and through the Nguni in KwaZulu-Natal, indigenous knowledge from such groups has been passed down the generational pipeline through word of mouth. This includes information essential for survival, as it is estimated that some 80% of the world's population is dependent on indigenous knowledge to meet their medicinal needs and 50% for food sources.[2] In addition to being didactic, oral literature has long been employed as an instrument for identity-building. Told in a group setting, oral traditions reinforce social structures and cultural norms, transmit knowledge between generations, and in many cases, provide moral or spiritual instruction.

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[1] University of Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, "About: The Project*," University of Cambridge Oral History Project*, http://www.oralliterature.org/about/project.html
[2] Ulwazi Programme, "Ulwazi: About," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Ulwazi:About

Dependent on individual memory and a willing listenership, this knowledge is susceptible to change over time. Many fear that indigenous culture is in danger of extinction. In a recent article for the Sunday Times, Durban-based storyteller and author Gcina Mhlope bemoaned what she considered the empty pockets of oral tradition. She remarked:

> "Today, sadly, very few grannies tell grandchildren stories. Children aren't interested in hearing stories from their grandparent's past. They prefer Granny Google. She's stolen the place of the real grandmother."[3]

Mhlope echoes the words of many others in South Africa who fear the demise of oral literatures and the encroachment of technology as the ultimate source of information. Elders die and livelihoods are disrupted by poverty, crime, urban migration, HIV/AIDS, and other rapid socio-economic changes. Western corporations and media continue their steady hegemonic march. Oral history collection projects are often spearheaded by academics and confined to the pages of academic journals, rather than disseminated amongst the people themselves. A central challenge the National Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) faces is thus one of oral history preservation and promotion. How can a culture protect that which can only be captured as a sound? How can it salvage its stories when the *ogogo* (English: "grandmothers") fall silent?

Ironically, oral methodology might prove to be the saviour in its own conservation project. Workshops on oral methodology and storytelling technique are cropping up across the country to empower communities to tell their own history and record it in their original voices. Such movements are harnessing oral tradition, but sidestepping its inherent transience by transforming that which was previously spoken once into something that is archived in perpetuity. Furthermore, technology may have a huge role to play in the process. In addition to housing information in libraries, museums, and archives, organizations worldwide are turning to digital media as a medium for cultural dissemination and access.

In many ways, there appears to be a new wave of oral tradition in post-Apartheid South Africa. Rather than being a dimension of culture in its own right, the oral arts are being implemented to preserve and promote culture in general. And rather than being circulated in small groups and confined to the "airless space of local tradition," what previously constituted oral literature (i.e. songs, poems, local history, etc.) is being documented and broadcast in public

[3] Gcina Mhlope, "What I've Learnt," *The Sunday Times*, March 20, 2011, 8.

spheres.[4] For instance, in 2009, Hachette Audio released an audio book with Nelson Mandela's "Favourite South African Folk Tales," narrated by the likes of Charlize Theron and Don Cheadle. Gcina Mhlope supplements her public performances and musical concerts with books, audio CDs, and other non-oral vehicles. Though undeniably creative and commercially successful, it is unclear what kind of oral literature the aforementioned projects and partnerships represent, if any. I am interested in discerning where the production of contemporary oral literature is taking place, in what way, and for what reasons. Can these new forms be considered an authentic sign that oral tradition is alive and well? Or when documented and digitally archived, is it a new discourse altogether? Where does orality end and literacy start when the spoken is turned into the written or the visual and packaged for mass consumption?

In addition to celebrity storytellers and orators, the movement to historicize the oral histories of local, often marginalized, populations provides an interesting counterpart to the heritage preservation project. In granting historically disadvantaged people storytelling space, what is accomplished? Is it merely the preservation of culture for the next generation? Or does it reaffirm the tradition of oral communication that scholars deem part and parcel to indigenous culture? These and other questions lie at the heart of post-conflict transformation if oral literature is to be considered a cornerstone of community identity.

This study concerns itself with the translation of oral tradition into digital/literate forms of heritage in the KZN province. It will explore a range of agents, from institutions to individuals, seeking to preserve indigenous knowledge in a climate that is undergoing dramatic social change. In investigating the use of the oral arts in heritage preservation, the following research was based in and around Durban, the second largest city in South Africa with a population of 3.5 million people, and conducted over a 5-week period. It focused on the work of the eThekwini Municipal Library Services, where efforts are being made to create a collaborative online database of local indigenous knowledge specific to the greater Durban Metropolitan area. Called the "Ulwazi Programme," the database's content is accessible from 89 public libraries in KwaZulu-Natal. Volunteers from the local community are trained as fieldworkers in methods of oral history research and sent out to record local histories. Their findings are then added to the

[4] Isabel Hofmeyer, "Not the Magic Talisman: Rethinking Oral Literature in South Africa," *World Literature Today* 70, no. 1 (Winter 1996), 88. http://ww.jstor.org/stable/40151859

website in the form of written articles for public access through MediaWiki open source technology. Volunteers are also given computer skills training and taught how to document their stories on the digital sphere in an attempt to record anything the communities deem important. This includes, but is not limited to, recorded music, dance, performances, traditional Zulu folktales, history, children's stories, games, photographs of beadwork, and clothing. Recent entries include the history of the bunny chow, an interview with a *sangoma*, and instructions for *umlabalaba*, or Zulu chess.

In addition to determining how the Ulwazi Programme operates and its efficacy as an indigenous knowledge e-library, I sought to determine community attitudes towards the project and its implications for Zulu culture. Unlike other organizations and institutions that collate indigenous knowledge for preservation and study, Ulwazi is allowing communities to write their own history and in effect, is shaping a new form of oral literature concerned with Durban-area history. By enabling indigenous and local communities to record and actively share aspects of their culture, a cadre of self-reflexive social scientists and oral historians are being trained as the new keepers of Zulu tradition. They are fashioning the ultimate "*gogo*" in a digital arena. While the project positions itself as a beneficial model for community participation, one that directly engages the individuals who are supplying the information, my research looked beyond the database to determine how the project directly benefits those involved. Is the model of preservation compatible with the essentially oral nature its content? The objectives of this paper are three-fold: (1) to situate the Ulwazi Programme within a web of local, municipal, and national platforms tasked with the conservation of cultural heritage, (2) to investigate how oral history and tradition can be engaged for the purposes of heritage preservation, specifically by the Ulwazi Programme, and (3) to determine the meaning of tradition and the salience of "knowing one's roots" among the Durban Metro community.

In carrying this study forward, a lengthy process was undertaken that involved a review of relevant oral literature, fieldwork, and content analysis. The paper will be roughly structured according to the aforementioned format and will include the following sections: (1) Background, an overview of the longstanding relationship between the public sector and cultural tradition, which will draw connections to various features of the Ulwazi Programme, (2) Literature Review, an summary of the literary theories surrounding oral scholarship and the representation of oral tradition in written form, (3) Methodology, an account of the techniques and methods that

were used in all aspects of this study, (4) Limitations of the Study, an analysis of the shortcomings, research holes, and potential biases of the study, (5) Findings, which will include a section on oral performance and storytelling, a section on the uses of oral tradition by the Ulwazi Programme, and a section on current social attitudes towards the historical content of oral tradition, (6) Conclusions, which will reflect on the study as a whole, drawing its various discoveries into conversation with one another and providing a critical analysis of the Ulwazi Programme, and finally, (7) Recommendations for Further Study. Ulwazi is unique among digitisation projects for its conscious efforts to involve the local community and this research aims to understand how that process is executed, its triumphs and failures, and what is gained by all involved after another piece is added to the cultural puzzle.

NOTE: In the context of this study, "culture" is meant to refer to Zulu culture specifically, as it is the dominant ethnic group in the city of Durban where the research took place. The Zulu people are descended from the Bantu-speaking mixed farmers that resided south of the Limpopo River. Those who lived beneath the mountain escarpment were called the Nguni and spoke dialects of the same language, whose modern survivors are Xhosa in the South and Zulu in the North.[5] Originally settled in small chiefdoms, the arrival of white invaders brought about the consolidation of the Northern Nguni under a royal family and the creation of a Zulu kingdom. This resulted in a period of intense warfare between rival kingdoms known as the *Mfecane* (Zulu) or *Difecane* (Sotho), or scattering, and resulted in the dispersal of enormous refugee populations fleeing from the conquest of the Zulu king Shaka.[6] Durban's Zulu community is considered to have descended from this ethnic group.

[5] Leonard Thomson, *A History of South Africa*, 3rd ed., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 16.
[6] Ibid, 80-1.

BACKGROUND

The Supporting Framework of Ulwazi – Institutions and Ideologies

In order to analyze the impact of Ulwazi on the Durban community, it is essential to understand the socio-political environment in which the program is located. As an initiative of the Libraries and Heritage Department of the eThekwini Municipality, there are a handful of institutional bodies and partner organizations whose involvement, though not as critical as that of the Ulwazi staff, is nonetheless a guiding force behind the programme's development and the heritage sector at large. These stakeholders represent national, provincial, and local spheres of government and include the Department of Arts and Culture, Library and Information Services (LIS), the eThekwini Municipal Library, and the Durban Metro community. The following background will provide a historical overview of each and attempt to paint the landscape that occasioned the creation of Ulwazi. Within the overarching framework, crucial aspects of Ulwazi's operation will be described, discussed, and traced to these institutions and ideologies. In the process, this section will demonstrate how several of Ulwazi's objectives line up with larger trends in the heritage sector. Why in the city of Durban in the nation of South Africa – is there fertile ground for an oral history and indigenous knowledge e-library of this kind?

"Making the Protea a National Priority": The Department of Arts and Culture

Much of the urgency that accompanies oral history projects such as Ulwazi is an effort to rebalance the skewed cultural politics of South African history, where the traditions of certain groups were considered more valuable than others. The 1996 White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage addressed this issue head on (with my emphasis in italics):

> At first [cultural] exchanges took place at the margins, as our different societies met; later, interaction and destruction quickened with the importation of slaves. It raced forward under the impact of industrialisation a century ago, when indigenous cultural forms began to collapse under the demands of mining and agriculture. The advent of formal apartheid with its overt use of culture as a political strategy, led to further stifling of expression, and indeed, to distortion. Yet cultural expression will always find a way to survive in the heartland. Our art forms, *oratory, praise poetry, storytelling, dance* and

> *rituals* live on in the collective memory. They are waiting in the wings to be reclaimed and proclaimed as part of the heritage of us all.[7]

The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) was formed in response to the disintegration of traditional or indigenous arts under decades of colonialism and apartheid. Its mission is to "develop and preserve South African culture to promote social cohesion and nation building," resulting in the inclusion and empowerment of vulnerable and previously marginalized groups. The DAC is also informed by the notion that the elevation of the arts, culture, and heritage is a hallmark of a free and equal society. The funding arrangements and institutional frameworks laid out by the White Paper are "inspired by the best traditions of democratic societies the world over" and using international example, designate the enjoyment of the arts, cultural expression, and preservation of one's heritage as basic human rights, not "luxuries" enjoyed by the privileged few.[8] At stake in the work of the DAC is the democratic promise of a new South Africa, in which heritage is a free market enjoyed by all. The Department receives as its primary mandate the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, with specific attention to the following sections:

Section 16(1) – "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression which includes -
a) freedom of press and other media;
b) freedom to receive or impact information or ideas;
c) freedom of artistic creativity; and
d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research."

Section 30 – "Everyone has the right to use language and to participate in the cultural life of their choice, but no one exercising these rights may do so in a manner inconsistent with any provision of the Bill of Rights."

Section 32 (1)— "Everyone has the right of access to –
a) any information held by the state; and
b) any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights."[9]

Under constitutional authority, it can be concluded that cultural, artistic, and linguistic heritage have been recognized and formalized by the South African government. Song, dance,

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[7] National Department of Arts, Culture, Science, and Technology, "White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage," *Department of Arts and Culture*, (June 4, 1996), http://www.dac.gov.za/white_paper.htm
[8] "White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage."
[9] National Department of Arts and Culture, "Medium-Term Strategic Framework, April 2010-March 2014," *Department of Arts and Culture*, 13, http://www.info.gov.za/view/DownloadFileAction?id=121234

storytelling, and other genres of oral traditions are tucked into the fold of the official "heritage" category, which was standardized in the same foundational 1996 White Paper (again, the italicization is not original to the document):

> Heritage is the sum total of wildlife and scenic parks, sites of scientific and historical importance, national monuments, historic buildings, works of art, literature and music, *oral traditions* and museum collections and their documentation which provides the basis for a shared culture and creativity in the arts.[10]

Like education, health, or defense, heritage is considered a public sector that receives a portion of the annual budget, albeit small but gaining ground with every fiscal year. For the 2011/12 year, the Department received an appropriation of 2468,6 million rand, 0.25% of the annual budget. [11] The expenditure of the DAC is mostly in the form of monetary transfers and subsidies to provinces, municipalities, and other departmental agencies and accounts, including libraries and library services.[12] By virtue of its inclusion in the mandate of the DAC, it could be argued that orality has received formal recognition in a post-Apartheid South Africa and by dint of its association with "heritage," is funded by the public wallet.

There are a blossoming number of areas to fund, but decreased pockets of funding that demand the heritage sector remains lucrative in order to survive. At the inauguration of the "National Consultative Summit on the Cultural and Creative Industries," Minister of Arts and Culture Paul Mashatile announced the repositioning of the arts, culture, and heritage sector within the New Growth Path. "It is through creativity," he remarked, that we build a golden economy." If culture was prioritized in 1996 to herald the principles of reconciliation and the dawn of a new democracy, it is now being looked to as a driver for economic growth, skill development, and job creation. In today's world, an active and vibrant cultural economy is a symbol of prosperity. Using performances from China, India, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Italy as a point of comparison, he commented, "There is no reason why a country such as South

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[10] "White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage."
[11] National Treasury, "Vote 13: Arts and Culture, Estimates of National Expenditure 2010," *National Treasury,* (February 17, 2010), http://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2010/ene/vote13.pdf
[12] "Medium Strategic Framework," 12-3.
[13]National Department of Arts and Culture, "Address by the Minister of Arts and Culture, Paul Mashatile, on the occasion of the National Consultative Summit on the Cultural and Creative Industry," *Department of Arts and Culture,* (April 14, 2011), http://www.dac.gov.za/speeches/minister/2011/14-04-2011.htm

Africa, with 8 World Heritage Sites, cannot use its heritage to promote tourism, economic growth and job creation."[13]

For the Department of Arts and Culture, freedom of expression (namely expression of the artistic and cultural variety) is within a person's economic prerogative, a freedom that intertwines political democratization with market liberalization into a beaded strand that can be woven together by a woman from the rural areas, brought to market, and sold for R50. The survival of the heritage sector is dependent on its utility and its going rate affected by the needs and wants of modern society. As salaried informants of indigenous knowledge, one must consider how Ulwazi's fieldworkers are also being pulled into this capitalist frame. Paid R300 an article, they too are able to earn a living through the retrieval of indigenous knowledge.

"Reading Rainbow": The Transformation of Libraries and Library Services

"Libraries are like…an extensive orchard, where one may pick delicious gems and appease their hunger, [and] gather fruit to sell the world."

-Editorial for The Bantu World, 1938[14]

"A robust library and information services is an essential factor in reconstruction and development."

-White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage, 1996[15]

Over ten thousand national libraries, public/community libraries, special libraries, government libraries and HE libraries fall within the scope of the Department of Arts and Culture. The DAC's library programme is tailored to the imagined role of libraries in a "new South Africa" as safe havens for oral and written expression: to read, write, debate, perform, and communicate in an indigenous or mother tongue. Libraries are domains where the constitutional promise for an artistic and cultural life can be exercised, though it took centuries for this to be the case. When read alongside the general timeline of South Africa, the development of libraries has a fascinating, push-pull relationship with the history of the nation. Depending on the century, as Archie Dick demonstrates in this thesis on South African library history, the different

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[14] Archie L Dick, "Chapter 2: The Development of South African Libraries in the 19th and 20th Centuries: Cultural and Political Influence," in *Libraries for the future: progress and development of South African libraries*, (Pretoria: LIASA, 2007), 16, http://www.dissanet.com/ifla/pdf/LIASA%2002%20Dick.pdf

[15] "White Paper on Arts, Culture, and Heritage."

periods of library use are reflective of contemporaneous social life. This has interesting implications for Ulwazi, an initiative of municipal Library and Library Services, and the following sections will argue how Ulwazi is a response to the intellectual priorities of today.

In one respect, libraries have been subsidiaries of the government and ruling powers for the dispensation of knowledge. In the early years of the Cape Colony, libraries were juxtaposed with mission stations, day schools, and Sunday schools to educate local communities. Mission libraries are credited with raising literacy rates amongst Khoisan adults and children and furnished with both religious and secular texts from abroad.[16] In short, libraries have long been used to indoctrinate readers with a controlled set of ideas or at the very least, advocate the ideas and accomplishments of hegemonic cultures.

In another respect, libraries were also used to create a counter hegemonic culture pitted against the discourse of the South African administration. H.I.E. Dhlomo, the mission-educated poet and oralist, used the network of library depots in the Transvaal to promote black readership, introduce new African writers to the public, and release books in Xhosa, Zulu, and Sotho, as well as newspapers in Zulu and English. An astonishing number of political groups, debating clubs, and self-help organizations were connected with libraries, as were individuals who would go on to champion the liberation movement, the African cultural movement, "Bantu literature," and the creation of a "people's education."[17] It seemed that wherever there was a political discussion to be had (or curtailed), libraries followed and from the richness of their knowledge, the personal philosophies of their readers, whether bigoted, radical, or conservative, were born. Like a shepherd goading his flock, libraries directed the liberation movement by riding on its ideological coattails. S'bu Ndebele, the former Premier of the KwaZulu-Natal Province, described the long debates in Robben Island prison library, managed by Ahmed Kathrada, as "important bricks in my personal development."[18]

From this chronicle, one can conclude that the narrative of library development was a multivocal, stop-and-start contest over the flow of information by individual communities. The building-up-tearing-down of facilities spurred the creation of alternative book collections and reading centers, tacked onto to already existing libraries and schools, sown in bursts of

[16] Dick, 14.
[17] Dick, 19.
[18] Dick, 21.

literariness by local organization, spread like the gospel to remote areas or driven underground to decentralized locales, such as prisons or universities abroad.

With the capacity to serve as either a bastion for formal education or grassroots intellectual movements, libraries have long been turbulent battlegrounds in the war over ideas. The position of the Ulwazi Programme within this gradient of power is uncertain. According to a conference paper presented by the Ulwazi project leader at the 2009 IST-Africa in Kampala, the majority of the content is derived from the input of the local community and calls the community "the most important member of the partnership."[19] Articles are digitally categorized under three groups – "Culture," "History," and "Environment" – but subcategories, such as "Beadwork" (Zulu: "umsebenzi wobuhlau) and "Indigenous Medicine" (Zulu: "imithi yestintu"), are not fixed. Ulwazi describes this tagging system as "folksonomy," which allows online content to be categorized by its author according to traditional or cultural sensibilities, rather than having to conform to an internationally standardized taxonomic vocabulary.[20] These subcategories appear in both English and isiZulu and arise out the topics that are brought forward by the fieldworker's themselves. Many of these subcategories have their basis in oral tradition, including children's stories, fairy tales, legends, and personal histories (Appendices A-C). An analysis of the database (officially titled the "Community Memory" database) conjured a wealth of content about oral tradition. There is a video series called "Memories from Inanda" that features Ela Gandhi and Lulu Dube telling the life stories of their famous predecessors.[21] In addition to a praise poem dedicated to Anton Lembede, a curious Internet surfer can also find a clan song about the death of King Zihlandlo at the hands of King Dingane and a folktale about the revenge exacted by an eagle on a hen.[22] Ulwazi's standards are non-prescriptive and surprisingly flexible. "It is their culture," the project leader explained. "They decide what is important for them. I don't make

[19] Elizabeth Greyling, "Content Development in an Indigenous Digital Library: a Model for Community Participation," (paper presented at the IST – Africa 2009 Conference Proceedings, Kampala, Uganda, 2009, 9.
[20] Ibid, 5.
[21] Mwelala Cele, "Durban Living Legends – Ela Gandhi" *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Durban_Living_Legend_-_Ela_Gandhi
Mwelala Cele, "Lulu Dube – Memories from Inanda, Durban" *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Lulu_Dube_-_Memories_from_Inanda,_Durban
[22] Kozekubenjani Shange, "Izibongo zikaMzwakhe Anton Lembede," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Izibongo_zikaMzwakhe_Anton_Lembede
Kozekubenjani Shange, "Amahubo esizewe saseMbo," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Amahubo_esizwe_saseMbo
Ulwazi Programme, "Uhheshe nesikhukhukazi" *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Uhheshe_nesikhukhukazi

those sort of judgment calls."[23] In this light, the database could be viewed as a "people education" with a bottom-up approach similar to Dhlomo and other library revolutionaries of the past.

Like a library catalogue however, contributions to Ulwazi are required to meet a certain standard. All stories must be 400 words in length, edited for spelling/grammatical errors, include one or more images with captions, and translated into an English or isiZulu summary (depending on which language the full story is written in). These requirements are indicative of the top-down, institutional structure within which Ulwazi is housed. The community's oral traditions are mediated by these various "dos" and "don'ts." They must pass through a processing sieve that conforms to the pilot model, which is obedient to the limitations of the MediaWiki software and the collection standards of the public library. The Ulwazi literature accurately describes the model as triangular. It is collaboration between current social software technology, the public library, and the community, but one has to wonder whether in the process of oral transmission, the community is forced to accommodate the other two legs of the table. [24]

A Partial Success Story: The eThekwini Municipal Library

Amid the national push to make public libraries more public and library-like, whereby more people have access to a greater wealth of materials, the City of Durban is a forerunner in the country. Opened in 1853 as the "Durban Mechanics Institute," the eThekwini Municipal Library is among one of the oldest institutions in KwaZulu-Natal. Originally located in a thatched wooden structure where 320 Dr. Pixley Keseme Street is today, the modest cluster of 400 books has grown to a collection of over a million items and is headquartered at 99 Umgeni Road. Services are distributed across the Don Africana collection, the Central Reference Library, 89 branch libraries, and a growing number of mobile library trucks. Many of the trends in library development are visible here. From an oral tradition standpoint, the offering of African scholarship, indigenous language materials, and hosting of poetry circles and storytelling festivals keep orality alive and well.[25]

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[23] Betsie Greyling, personal interview by author, eThekwini Municipal Library Services, Durban, April 7, 2011.
[24] Greyling, "Content Development," 4.
[25] eThkwini Municipality, "Welcome to the eThekwini Library Website," *eThekwini Muncipality: The Official Site of the City of Durban*, http://www.durban.gov.za/durban/services/libraries.

Though the services of the eThekwini Municipal Library may shine on paper, the real test of their efficacy is measured in foot traffic between shelves. It is here that an otherwise hopeful picture dims. In the most recent eThekwini Quality of Life survey, only 16% of 1200 households reported visiting a library and 38% of households claimed access to libraries. The majority of visitors identified as Asian.[26]

On the basis of this information, it should not be concluded eThekwini Municipal Library is of little value to those who cannot or do not regularly make use of their services. If anything, it challenges the municipal libraries to involve the Durban community in creative ways, providing services that are in lockstep with local interest and counterbalancing the needs of a diverse and widespread population. Stretching from Durban's coastline in the East to Cato Ridge in the West, the eThekwini Municipal Area has a diverse array of cultures and economic realities. The rural and peri-urban areas around Durban are particularly scattered, accounting for 67% of the city's spatial territory and home to an estimated 750,000 people, or 21% of the city's 3.5 million population.[27] In comparison to cities, these areas contain fewer and poorly maintained arterial roads and limited public transportation. Additionally, peri-urban and rural settlements do not enjoy the same caliber of social and economic amenities as their urban counterparts, but suffer from the highest levels of poverty, disease, and unemployment. Consequently, library and Information Services (LIS) and Information Communication Technologies (ICT), such as computers, Internet, and e-mail, are far and few between. The distribution of LIS remains characterized by disparities in income, race, and spatial access. Township and rural areas are among the most impoverished of library services and tangentially, suffer from the highest rates of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and limited access to education facilities.[28]

These are hurdles that must be overcome and pose a particular challenge to the Ulwazi Programme, which streams its content on a digital stratosphere of library computers and the World Wide Web. Is the form of preservation—off-site in branch libraries with Internet access—at odds with the lifestyles of the content providers, who live in these peri-urban and rural areas? The project leader spoke candidly of such a disconnect:

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[26] eThkwini Municipality, "eThekwini Quality of Life: Household Survey 2009-2010, Plain Language Edition" (Durban: Atlas Printers, 2011), 19.
[27] "Quality of Life: Household Survey 2009 – 2010", 7.
[28] Betsie Greyling, personal interview by author, eThekwini Municipal Library Services, Durban, April 7, 2011.

> For an old mama for 80 years old who tells the most interesting stories, she has no sense of who benefits from that story because she can never get to the Internet. So they don't have access and she is too old to be interested in that kind of technology. So for her, it is just someone nice enough to tell the story to. But that is why it is so precious. They are going to pass on one of these days and the stories will be lost forever.[29]

It is a challenge that Ulwazi is not alone in facing, but all branches of the municipal library. In order for the eThekwini Municipal Library to call itself a public service, it must not be torn asunder by the mammoth income disparities of the local populations. It must find a way for all citizens, from the wealthy white businessman in Umhlanga Rocks to the *gogo* in Amtikulu, to access library content at will, whether in the digital or analog form. Furthermore, it must ensure that upon obtaining such resources, both businessman and *gogo* discover information of personal value that holds a candle to their needs, interests, and desires.

How Granny Google Got Her Groove Back: The Digitization of Oral Tradition

At present, oral tradition has been swept into a digital revolution that is transforming the way in which we research, record, catalogue, regulate, interpret, and share oral content. Websites and e-mails can now be embedded with audio-visual material that digitally records interviews, performances, presentations, and other modes of spoken delivery. Heritage preservation projects have co-opted this newfangled digital technology with impressive results, transposing the oral arts into a space where much of what is lost in written translation is preserved and made audible/visible with the click of a button. Michael Frisch believes that the digitization of sound and image will convert our text-based literacy to new forms of oral and visual literacy, resulting in a "post documentary sensibility" that will put the "oral" back in oral history.[30]

Technology is the bread and butter of the Ulwazi Programme's success. In addition to using Web 2.0 technologies that allow for large-scale collaboration of the online database, Ulwazi also makes use of the social media websites Facebook and Twitter, the photo sharing application Flickr, and the video sharing website Vimeo to enhance written information and advertise the project further. It allows for the digitization of traditional games, such as

[29] Betsie Greyling, personal interview by author, eThekwini Municipal Library Services, Durban, April 28, 2011.
[30] Michael Frisch, "Towards a Post-Documentary Sensibility: Theoretical and Political Implications of New Information Technologies in Oral History," (paper presented to the XIIIth International Oral History Conference, Rome, June 2004), 102–14.

umlabalaba and *mancala*. Most importantly, since MediaWiki software is friendly to all languages, including Zulu, Ulwazi hosts some of the only Zulu language material on the Internet. It is continually one of the first websites, if not the first, to appear when typing in a Zulu search term to Google.[31] Direct traffic to Ulwazi's website, which made up 8.46% of visits between November 1st, 2009 and November 1st, 2010, was minimal in comparison to the 16.59% of traffic sent from referring websites and the 74.84% of traffic from search engines, with organic searches on Google accounting for the vast majority. The keyword that attracted the greatest number of visits was not "Ulwazi," but "Umemulo" (a traditional 21st birthday celebration in Zulu culture).[32] Since its last modification in July of 2010, the "Umemulo" page has been accessed 6,935 times.[33] Through the snowball effect that reinforces the database's popularity exponentially, search engine optimization enables users to be redirected to the Ulwazi website through external links.

The Department of Arts and Culture has been so taken with the promise of digital media that is in the process of writing a *National Policy on the Digitisation of Heritage Resources*. Last February, their policy-drafting workshop attracted 170 delegates and stakeholders to the Gallagher Convention Centre in Midrand, Johannesburg. When the policy is completed, it will address issues of intellectual property rights, indigenous knowledge access, and propose the creation of National Digital Repositories and Institute for Digital Heritage.[34] These national dialogues might have an impact on the work of local organizations such as Ulwazi and point to an emergence of digital heritage resources to capture the oral traditions of the nation.

South Africa is working to close the digital divide and Internet access is relatively widespread in comparison to many other African countries. According to the most recent statistics, Internet usage in South Africa hovers around 10.8% of the population and penetration in Africa is 10.9%.[35] Major cities and smaller towns are virtually connected through Internet cafes. Through a conditional grant of R45 million from the government, the Mobile Library Truck Project (MLTP) has sought to provide access to print and digital material and

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[31] Greyling, personal interview, April 7.
[32] Google Analytics, "www.ulwazi.org Report, Nov 1 , 2009 - Nov 1, 2010," *Google Analytics*, 3.
[33] Ulwazi Programme, "Umemulo," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Umemulo
[34] National Department of Arts and Culture, "National Policy on the Digitisation of Heritage Resources, Final Draft for Public Review, Version 8," *Department of Arts and Culture*, (August 2010), 1-61, http://www.dac.gov.za/policies/NATIONAL%20POLICY%20ON%20DIGITISATION%20V8.pdf
[35] Internet World Stats. "Internet Usage Statistics for Africa," Internet Usage Statistics, http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats1.htm.

photocopying services in the deep rural areas of KZN.[36] In the Durban Metro, "Digital Doorways," i.e. standalone Internet kiosks, are being installed in rural areas as portals for free Internet access.[37] Cellular communications are particularly comprehensive and as of 2010, it was estimated that more than 90% of the South African population has access to a mobile phone.[38] ICT is a conduit of South Africa's development agenda and has become a central priority of the national government.

The question now faced by Ulwazi is whether it will move away from a "document" proxy, in the form of a 400-word article, to non-text-reliant cataloguing of oral material through audio and visual technology. As of now, the database's contains 215 photographs on their Flickr account and 11 videos on Vimeo. It is hoped these sections will continue to grow.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Oral Traditions in South African Literature

South Africa is a nation rich in oral tradition. Beginning with the songs and stories of the Bushman and Khoi through the praise poems (Zulu/Xhosa: "izibongo; Sotho: "lithoko") of African chiefdoms, the transmission of words through oral performance in a variety of social or discursive settings is, according to Duncan Brown, "our contribution to world literature."[39] An oral text, by definition, requires utterance in order to be realized and is thus subject to the temporality of an event, locality of a place, and idiosyncrasy of a speaker. Since the oral text does not live beyond the moment of delivery, the study of orality is inherently challenging. In comparison to written forms, it is maintained by some that oral studies have been cast aside to the backcountry of South African literature. Others contest that the contributions of such visionary figures as Z D Mangoeala, E S Segoete, Sol T Plaatje, B W Vilakazi, H I E Dhlomo, Mazisi Kunene, and A C Jordan lay a rich and fertile groundwork for oral scholarship. The past

[36] National Department of Arts and Culture, "Budget speech for 2011/12 delivered in the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature by the Honorable Weziwe Thusi, MEC for Arts and Culture, Sport And Recreation, province of KwaZulu-Natal - Vote 15: Arts and Culture," *Department of Arts and Culture*, (March 31, 2011), http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=17470&tid=31239
[37] Greyling, personal interview, April 7.
[38] "National Policy on the Digitisation of Heritage Resources," 13.
[39] Duncan Brown, "*Voicing the Text: South African Oral Poetry and Performance"*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 1.

dozen years has brought about a surge of interest in oral genres, which include wisdom-lore (sayings, proverbs, riddles), songs, poetry, folk tales, and historical narrative.

The result is a vast and at times, unwieldy body of work, to which an ambitious student could devote lifetimes of study. The following literature review does not purport to be a thorough survey of the subject. It is derived from scholarly articles, essays, and edited collections on oral literature, literature that imbues oral themes, and the debates that surround the status of oral tradition. It is writers writing about other writers, conversing with their ideas, and referencing other works through frequent in-text citation. In an effort to synthesize this multiplicity of voices and give resonance to the cacophony, this essay will concern itself with one of the most foundational debates in oral studies (with guest appearances by the writers who appear in the boxing ring): the relationship between the spoken word and printed text. It will discuss early efforts to document oral forms of discourse, highlighting recent critics that do so in a particularly innovative way. In tracing the lineage of scholarly thought, it can be concluded that the socio-political environment of the oral tradition is informing the way in which critics interpret a praise song, folk tale, or other varieties of oral tradition. There is a movement, as Karin Barber and P F de Maraes Farias propose, to "put the textuality back into history and history back into textuality."[40] In the process, the revival of a more historicized reading of oral tradition can be viewed as a method of cultural revival, recuperating the speech of marginalized communities and acknowledging stories omitted from the South African narrative.

Before plumbing the depths of oral literary theory, one must know something of the discipline's history and pay their respects by the fireside. Let us begin with a story. In Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1930), the first novel in English by a black African, the courageous female protagonist loses her way. She is running through the woods, keeping the sunset at her right side and fleeing from the extermination campaign of the Matabele. Suddenly, a brilliant red light fills the sky above and she is reminded of a tale once told to her:

> Two men, it was said, decided to determine the course of the sun from west to east, or how he managed, after setting in the west, to return and resume his journey from the east every morning. Someone told them that those desirous of watching the sun's homecoming could do so by staying up all night with their eyes fixed on the west. Their curiosity would be satisfied, so the story went, but they could never live to tell the tale; for none but children of death ever

[40] Karin Barber and P F de Moraes Farias (eds), *Discourse and its Disguises*: *The Interpretation of African Oral Texts*, (Birmingham: Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1989), 2.

beheld the sun going east.[41]

The narration then switches to Mhudi's own interior monologue:

I mediated over this story as I stood and watched the sky in the west becoming redder. I believed that I was about to witness the appearance of 'the bloody red ball,' see the return of the sun and die before dawn.[42]

It is a manoeuvre of stylistic genius that was the first to plant an oral tradition within the terrain of a Western-style prose novel. Plaatje navigates around the embedded folktale with detail of Mhudi's flight. Without breaking the novel's continuity, the author is able to record and validate a folk tale of the Barolong people by demonstrating its relevance in a time of crisis. Heritage is not a time capsule, buried in the depths of Mhudi's memory, but accessible upon the immediate association of a story she once heard with the setting sun. Oral storytelling can be "written" and "read" in the form of a book, while keeping its essential character ("told" and "heard") intact. It is not part of the narrative, but a subtext within the narrative that the protagonist uses to interpret the world around her.

A handful of notable works of South African literature have followed in the tradition of *Mhudi,* salvaging culture through the adaptation of oral forms to the printed page. Oftentimes, this has involved what Duncan Brown coins a "literate intermediary, who often holds a position of political, and of publishing, power over the performer or informant."[43] The bevy of South African praise poetry available today, for instance, has survived beyond its performance through the writings of missionaries, colonial administrators, anthropologists, historians, and other dedicated scribes. Hlonipha Mokoena recently published a fascinating work on what could be considered the earliest indigenous historian—Magema Fuze—who published the first textbook in isiZulu *Abantu Abamnyama Lapa Bavela Ngakona* in 1922. As a first-generation Christian convert, Fuze bridged the gap between the so-called "oral culture" of the native population and the "literary culture" of the homestead, transcribing pages of everyday dialogue and conducting field research among his own people. At stake is the question of *transcription,* or how to properly represent oral speech in written form. The interlocutor might be ill equipped, Brown contends, to capture the full meaning and ethos of a performance in words. To even commit an

[41] Sol Plaatje, *Mhudi*, Stephen Gray (ed.), (Johannesburg: Quagga Press, 1975), 39.
[42] Ibid, 39.
[43] Duncan Brown, "Introduction," in *Oral Literature & Performance in Southern Africa*, ed. Duncan Brown (Oxford: James Currey Publishing, 1999), 4.

izibongo of Shaka to the page obviates the variance of the text with each delivery. Furthermore, the *translation* of the oral text from one language into another, as often occurs in oral studies, is fraught with problems. No two languages possess a corresponding vocabulary and something is undoubtedly lost in the translation of a Zulu term to an English proxy.

There remains an impulse among scholars to accentuate the unique properties of oral delivery and set it in contrast to literate practices. In her comparison of Western-style autobiographical prose narrative and praise poems, Judith Lütge Coullie identifies aspects of the poetic mode that are ontologically distinct from the narrative mode. The narrativised self, such as Peter Abraham's *Return to Goli* (1953) or Nelson Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* (1994), follows the logic of sequential time, demonstrating how the present self is an end product of past selves through cause and effect chains of development. Authorship is uncontested, bound up in the figure of the writer, and authority sourced in an individual's self-interpretation. An autobiography is privately composed, and privately "consumed." "It relies on the isolation of both writer and reader: neither writing nor reading is a social activity."[44] In many ways, Coullie elaborates, prose biography abides by the logic of Western capitalism, in that a document is a piece of private property that is circulated among persons, with the author taking legal responsibility for the content therein contained.

Praise poems, conversely, belong to no one. The self-portrayal of a chief or other notable person is achieved within an entirely social context, taking place among fellows in the same place at the same time, inviting howls of interruption and cheers of encouragement. Authority lies within the hands of the community, rather than a single author, and authorship itself is a multi-vocal construction that borrows from the stories of the ancestors, the dialogic voices and multiple memories of poets and listeners, that together venture towards some central point of a collectively fashioned *izibongo*. The principle of *ubuntu* – or "self in community" whereby a person is only realized through other people – resonates strongly with this participatory style of biography. The mercurial sensibility of oral praise indicates that there is no definitive version of a person or event – as each *izibongo* is as truthful as its present telling – and no "official" version of history to be scripted. Ong argues that the fixity of words in highly literate societies encourages an itemized conception of history, one reducible to "facts" and bullet points of

[44] Judith Lütge Coullie,"(Dis)Locating Selves Izibongo & Narrative Autobiography in South Africa," in *Oral Literature & Performance in Southern Africa,* ed. Duncan Brown, (Oxford: James Currey Publishing, 1999), 65.

information that are shelved in perpetuity. In contrast, oral cultures are event based and refashion history to suit their present needs. "It is the domain of the ancestors, a resonant source for renewing awareness of present existence…Orality knows no lists or charts or figures."[45] The volatility of an oral text renders its delivery part and parcel to the words of the speech.

Anthropologists, historians, and literary critics since the 19th century have been hard pressed to convey the visual-auditory-sensory conglomerate of a folk tale (Zulu: *izinganekwane;* Xhosa: *iintsomi*), a song, or a riddle. Ruth Finnegan, author of the seminal work *Oral Literature in Africa* (1970), describes the vexed relationship between oral and print technologies as "the Great Divide," one that separates orality from literacy into two dichotomous spheres of contrasting cultures, a non-literate one that is oral, tradition-bound, and popular and a literate opposite that is secular, modern, and elite. According to Isabel Hofmeyer, one deleterious stereotype that results from the oral/literate binary (popular amongst 19th century anthropologists) is the conception of orality as static, an artifact of indigeneity that moves untouched from generation to generation, and writing as "concerned with modernity, change, and progress."[46] This oral/traditional, written/modern debate is further complicated by the work of Walter Ong, who considers writing a "technology", on par with print and computer innovations, that fundamentally alters its content. Whereas speech can only consider words phonetically, with each sound coming into existence as quickly as it departs, written words are present all at once and become "things" rather than "events."[47] Words can be lifted from their audience, in a way that sound cannot, individuated as a stanza in a book, and cross-contaminated with other texts.

Early studies of oral literature thus sought a comparative, cross-cultural analysis that plucked oral forms from the time and place they first developed. In the 1920s and 1930s, Milman Parry paralleled Homeric tradition with Slavic epics and along with his student Albert Lord, took an anthropological-structuralist approach that looked for the universal techniques of oral tradition. Ruth Finnegan criticized the Parry-Lord School for failing to account for the historical particularities of literature's origin and in her work on Zulu praise poetry, situated the oral text within the wider frame of Zulu aristocracy. Following in Finnegan's footsteps, current

[45] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, (New York: Methuen Press, 1982), 16.

[46] Isabel Hofmeyer, "Not the Magic Talisman: Rethinking Oral Literature in South Africa," *World Literature Today* 70, no. 1 (1996), 89. http://ww.jstor.org/stable/40151859>

[47] Ong, 10.

scholarship by Karin Barber, P F de Moraes Farias, Liz Gunner, Isabel Hofmeyer, and others combines poetic analysis with historicity, asking *what* the text accomplishes in its social sphere (politically, culturally, spiritually, etc.) and *how*, through rhetorical features, strategies, etc.), that suits anthropologists and literary theorists alike.

This more sophisticated approach to oral literature study is evident in various genres, including oral short stories, historical narratives, and praise poetry. The oral-style short story is a long cry from the fireside tales of A W Drayson's *Tales at the Outspan, or Adventures in the Wild Regions of Southern Africa* (1862) in which the frame narrator (the author reporting the evening's proceedings) repeats the evening's anecdotes in artless verbatim, without irony or subversive construction. Craig MacKenzie (1999) demonstrates how the genre grew more self-reflective throughout the 20th century and compares their respective stories of a leopard sighting to illustrate his point. Drayson focuses on the crafty expression of the leopard's countenance and the surprise of the Boer who crossed his path. Bosman's telling spends little time on the spectacle of the big cat and more on the outlandish behaviour of the Afrikaner farmers, likening their shooting campaign to the Boer Wars. The introduction of irony to oral stories thus becomes an occasion for social commentary and satire, unlike Drayson's story, which is "little more than an attempt to evoke Africa in the minds of his metropolitan readers by way of simple tales of adventure."[48] The appropriation of literary devices in renditions of oral material allows transcription to be taken one step further and brought to bear on the concerns of the surrounding community. Sociology is writ large in the story of a leopard.

Studies of memory, folklore, and "oral tradition" in non-Western and indigenous societies are another dimension of the oral prism that pays increasing attention to the social world that surrounds the storyteller. In her studies of the oral historical narratives (Zulu: *indaba*) of the Ndebele in Northern Transvaal, Isabel Hofmeyer's 1993 work *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told* applies a literary template to the craft of storytelling through the identification of key stylistic features that enable the memorization and recall of the story to its teller. These include:

> Heroic larger-than-life characters that assist recollection; an episodic rather than a climactic plot that is easier to remember in performance, minimal scene setting and switching, two

[48] Craig MacKenzie, "The Emergence of the South African Oral-Style Short Story A W Drayson's Tale at the Outspan," in *Oral Literature & Performance in Southern Africa*, ed. Duncan Brown, (Oxford: James Currey Publishing, 1999), 156.

characters to a scene, dramatic dialogue, and the use of gestural, performance, and phonological resources.[49]

In one passage, Hofmeyer scans twenty-three accounts of the murder of Piet Potgieter, a notorious raider who enslaved Ndebele during the Boer incursions into the Northern Transvaal beginning in the 1840s. He was shot from below while overlooking a cave entrance, the one Boer death in a bath of otherwise Ndebele blood. Though four selected renditions vary in detail and dramatic gesture, with some enacting the death more vividly than others, they all make mention of the "peeping" Boer soldiers at the lip of the cave. Under Hofmeyer's scrupulous pen, the simple phrase "he was peeping, he was peeping" becomes a grounding narrative unit, a core cliché that reminds listeners of how foolishly the Boer nemesis exposed himself from above, only to meet his demise from a bullet down below. It is a subversion of the existing power structure, since "it is the mighty who fall and the weak who triumph."[50] In committing oral histories to thorough rhetorical analysis, mining the tale for key words and images, Hofmeyer can situate the event in time and allow it to speak to the tensions between colonizer and colonized. A lost history can be unpacked in a single word—"peeping"—and the cultural memory of the Ndebele recovered through the printed voices of their own people.

The social force of orality is not limited to the histories and folklore of South Africa, but contributes to the formation of political rhetoric as well. David Coplan's *In the Time of Cannibals* (1994) treat orality as a project of "cultural self-preservation" in the wake of colonial and capitalist intervention. "The use of Sesotho performance by labour migrants to create an integrated, positive self-concept in the face of displacement and alienation represents simply the continued application of a pre-existing cultural morality in the context of Basotho dependency on a world system."[51] With the defeat of the Boers by England in 1902 and reorganization of labour to service the mines, rural life was radically transformed into a shrinking land base increasingly alienated from the city and vulnerable to annexation. "Cannibalism," a Sesotho term to describe anyone who thrives by way of inflicting injury on another or expropriating

[49] Isabel Hofmeyer, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993), 106.

[50] Hofmeyer, *We Spend Our Years*, 116.
[51] David B Coplan, *In the Time of Cannibals: The Word Music of South Africa's Basotho Migrants*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 15.

another's resources, becomes an idiomatic reference to the colonial government and suggestive of the way in which the oral tradition interacts with a radically changing political environment.

In *Oral Literature & Performance,* Hofmeyer commends Coplan for his historicized approach to oral performance that exemplifies how Basotho men interpret migrancy and moreover, acknowledges the influence of other oral genres, such as radio, record, and cassette. She places Coplan's work in contrast to Megan Biesele's *Women Like Meat*, a collection of Ju/'hoan tales from the 1970s that disregards the influence of Tswana, Herero, and "white settlers" in lieu of a more "authentic" and "uncontaminated" analysis. The tendency to equate orality with cultural purity is another prevailing trope in oral history scholarship, resulting in an ethnically absolutist view that conflates indigenous culture with pre-modern and pre-colonial times.

The suggestion that indigenous culture has remained untouched throughout the colonial period and, as Karen Press notes, "can be mobilized at the moment of independence" is troublesome on several levels, namely in assuming that such an essentialist, bounded culture exists in the first place and that the culture has lain dormant since the arrival of European ships on native shores.[52] One glance at the hymns of Isaiah Shembe for example, which blend Christian spiritual with Zulu song, provides empirical evidence of the time-honoured interaction between the written and spoken word and the syncretic fabric of oral tradition, responsive to urbanization, poverty, and the social atmosphere of its time. Liz Gunner (1999) identifies contemporary praise poetry as a vehicle of public mobilization during the liberation struggle, engaging audiences in critical debates about the nature of leadership, black identity, political violence, and policy making. In the 1930s, the famous *imbongi* Hlongwe praised the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union and *imbongi* Alfred Temba Qabula endorsed union activity in the 1980s. Mzwakhe Mbuli performed two *izibongo* at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as State President in 1994. These "hybridizations" that "collapse the heroic past into an heroic present" harness an oral genre from its village confines to commemorate modern heroes.[53]

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[52] Karen Press, "Building a National Culture in South Africa," in *Rendering Things Visible: Essays on South African Culture*, ed. Martin Trump, (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1990), 26-27.
[53] Liz Gunner, "Remaking the Warrior? The Role of Orality in the Liberation Struggle & in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in *Oral Literature & Performance in Southern Africa,* ed. Duncan Brown, (Oxford: James Currey Publishing, 1999), 52.

Mixing orality with written medium defy easy categorization, such hybridizations have opened the field substantially to interdisciplinary interpretations.

It is erroneous to assume that oral traditions are the property of South Africa past life or only found within a South African environment. Oral speech is the most fundamental mode of human communication and when considered in this light, arises in almost every corner of modern society. In his State of the Nation Address on February 10th, 2011, President Jacob Zuma began his speech with a nod to the country's first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela, and the 21st anniversary of Mandela's release from prison the following day. He commented:

> It was a historic and very special moment for our country, which demonstrated the victory of our people over tyranny and apartheid oppression. The events of that day prepared the ground for the implementation of our vision of a free, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, united and prosperous South Africa. We have entered the 17th year of freedom, ready to continue the drive to make South Africa a successful and prosperous country, building on the foundation that was laid by President Mandela.[54]

Listening to his remarks, one gets the sense that before commencing the parliamentary year and taking the pulse of the nation, a tribute must be made to the man who "started it all"—the legendary Nelson Mandela—a cultural hero (of the type Liz Gunner describes) writ large on the conscious of contemporary South African leaders as the high water mark for social justice. All subsequent economic activity, service delivery, infrastructure development, patching of the social net, and padding of schools and hospitals are in time with his lionized footsteps. And after all was said and done, the statistics recited, the triumphs recognized, the failures accounted for, to a smattering of applause from a joint sitting of Parliament, Zuma once again returns to the legacy of his forefather, this time with a direct quote from Mandela's 1994 inaugural address:

> We understand it still, that there is no easy road to freedom.We know it well, that none of us acting alone can achieve success.We must therefore act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation building, for the birth of a new world. Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work, bread, water and salt for all. Let each know that for each the body, the mind and the soul have been freed to fulfill themselves.[55]

President Zuma's 2011 *State of the Nation* can be analyzed as a piece of modern day oral performance that uses the same strategy as Sol Plaatje in 1939: it incorporates an oral text within

[54] The Presidency, "State of the Nation Address By His Excellency Jacob G Zuma, President of the Republic of South Africa, at the Joint Sitting of Parliament, Cape Town," *South African Government Information*, (February 10, 2011), http://www.info.gov.za/speech/DynamicAction?pageid=461&sid=16154&tid=27985
[55] Ibid.

a contemporary setting for the purposes of preservation and legitimization. By bookending his speech in the words of his predecessor, Zuma is accomplishing more than making a passing reference to the first democratically elected president. He is invoking the totality of Mandela's image and political vision: the pedagogy of reconciliatory justice, the pacifying demeanour, and the winning smile. In the frame of a speech, one could even consider the name of "Mandela" a device of oral literature, a powerful three-syllable sound sequence packed with meaning and useful in any public forum. Underpinning Zuma's speech is a reverence for tradition, for the older generation of struggle leaders that loom in the popular imagination of South Africa. This is communicated through clever use of an oral trick – a speech within a speech – that provides conclusive evidence about the endurance of oral tradition in nation building and South Africa's 21st century development agenda.

As can be seen in the case of oral literature, the researcher concerns himself or herself with the inherent challenge of translating a moment that can be experienced into a word that can be read. From the impassioned telling of a Boer attack, the delivery of a praise song on behalf of a chief, or the performance of a spontaneous *sefela*, a writer must not only replicate Geertz's "textuality" of the event, but the cultural and historical thrust of its telling. The sociological context in which the story is told is equally as important as the story itself. Anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski was among the first to recognize that oral literature is situated in what he coined a "total social context" and is used by people to express their ideas, beliefs, and social relationships:

> These tales live in the memory of man, in the way in which they are told, and even more in the complex interest which keeps them alive, which makes the narrator recite with pride or regret, which makes the listener follow eagerly, wistfully, with hopes and ambitions roused."[56]

A story cannot be studied in isolation of its framework, as by definition, a folk tale relies on the speaker's memory and is spoken in a way characteristic to him or her, in one place and one time. In this way, the evolution of oral studies has been a dogged effort to capture the dynamics of performance and commit to paper, ever so humbly, the sorrows and joys, systemically engineered by an oppressive state, synchronized with the milieu of a clan, set against the backdrop of a city, or experienced within the private depths of the soul, that attend his speech and shape the sounds that hover momentarily in the air.

[56] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, Religion, and Other Essays 1948*, (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 84.

METHODOLOGY

The following research combined various qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze the status of oral tradition and the work of Ulwazi from different perspectives. It depended largely on the cooperation of Ulwazi's participants, both fieldworkers and staff members, and various members of the Durban community. Several interview subjects were identified only when the opportunity to speak to them was made available and depended on the spontaneity of being in the right place at the right time with the right people. Other interviews were planned. The list of questions drawn up in advance was tailored to whichever insights I felt that individual could best provide. The research carried its author to a variety of locations and venues related to the permutation of oral tradition and cultural values in the metropolitan area of Durban. All told, I spent five days with the staff members of Ulwazi, one day shadowing one of their fieldworkers in the INK area (Inanda, Ntuzuma, KwaMashu), two days at the *Nozincwadi* Storytelling Festival, and one day at Menzi High School. Interviews ranged from 10 to 90 minutes and took place in person (with the exception of Mhlope, who was interviewed over the phone). The methodology involved:

1. Two formal interviews with the project leader of Ulwazi (at the beginning and end of research)
2. Observation of an Ulwazi fieldworker on the job and his interaction with a *sangoma*, a community member providing indigenous knowledge for Ulwazi
3. One formal interviews with another Ulwazi fieldworker
4. Observation of the Ulwazi storytelling circle and day-to-day operations
5. One formal interview with a Gcina Mhlope
6. One group interview with three Menzi High School educators
7. One group interview with twelve Menzi High School learners
8. Written, anonymous, and confidential survey of those twelve learners
9. Content analysis of the Ulwazi "Community Memory Database"
10. Photographs of Ulwazi's central programme office
11. Analysis of Ulwazi internal and external literature, including a position paper of the project leader, fieldworker roster, Google analytics data, posters, and memorandums
12. Document analysis of the Department of Arts and Culture, KZN, and eThekwini Municipal Library Services

A substantial portion of my research involved sitting in the Ulwazi office to meet various members of the staff and through participant observation, observe their work. After interviewing the project leader and receiving her approval, I chose to shadow one of the fieldworkers during his research to understand the heritage preservation process, beginning with the collection of oral

and visual material by community workers and ending with the synthesis of that information into a written article. This lengthy participant observation process was supplemented by an interview with an additional Ulwazi fieldworker, observation of Ulwazi's monthly review meeting, and interviewing the project leader once again about the history of the organization, its current programming, and plans for the future. Special attention was paid to how oral traditions affected both the theoretical groundwork and praxis of Ulwazi's day-to-day operations. Through quantitative and qualitative methods, I performed a content analysis of Ulwazi database and also reviewed the literature produced by Ulwazi leadership to understand its unique indigenous library model.

Documenting local history is one only of many endeavours in the renaissance of oral practice. The revival of this tradition by a Gcina Mhlope and a rising crop of storytellers and spoken word artists is an encouraging sign that the oral arts are alive and well. In order to better understand the key dimensions of oral performance and its relationship to the written word, I attended Mhlope's annual storytelling festival to observe how performers interacted with the audience, how the audience reacts to them, and the oral exchange that took place. This portion of the research was rounded out by a phone conversation with Mhlope herself.

Observation, interview, and anonymous surveys were my principal methods of local research among the Ulwazi's source communities, namely in the township Umlazi. Particular attention was paid to how everyday people, especially young people, interacted with cultural tradition and history and for what reason. This took the form of a focus group of twelve learners and three educators at Menzi High School in Umlazi. Though not planned in the original proposal, this section of the research arose out of a necessity to provide a macro-level perspective of the place of oral tradition – which often contains historical and cultural information – within today's South Africa. The opinions of those interviewed were used as a yardstick to gauge the relevance of a *gogo'*s wisdom within urban areas, to expose Ulwazi's vision to fresh eyes, and predict how it would be received by the very communities it was intended to benefit. In order to place Ulwazi within social and historical context, I concluded my research by reviewing the official documentation from the Department of Arts and Culture and the eThekwini Municipal Library Services to learn more about the national policy on heritage preservation and the digital wave that is sweeping museums, archives, and institutions

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

From the very beginning, this study was limited by time constraints and an admittedly scattered structure, resulting in an incomplete portrait of many of the sectors discussed in the research. Depth was often sacrificed for breadth, resulting in gaping holes in the research, unanswered questions, and a portrait that is perhaps not as coherent as the author originally intended. Though the bulk of the research was dedicated to Ulwazi, key members of the staff, including the content manager and web master, were not interviewed due to scheduling conflicts. Both are heavily involved with the programme, in ways that are perhaps even more intimate than that of the project leader. The content manager especially, interacts with the fieldworkers on a close basis. All stories featured on the Ulwazi database land in her lap first and she has final say on their digital incarnation. The insights of these two individuals have been invaluable, as would the input of the other six fieldworkers, in determining whether Ulwazi makes valuable use of oral history methodologies in the preservation of indigenous information.

Another voice that would have added greater complexity and nuance to the research was a member of the Department of Arts and Culture, who could comment on the inclusion of oral tradition in heritage preservation and whether there was a prevailing belief that South African culture needed to be salvaged. In lieu of a human source, the research instead turned to primary literature and policy, the majority of which can be found in the "Background" section. Although revelatory, the research might have benefited from the additional input of someone whose job it was enact these policies. Their remarks could have been incorporated steadily throughout the "Findings" sections to put the Ulwazi Programme in a larger context, rather than quarantined to an entirely different section of the paper.

The research would have also benefited from the experiences of a branch library where members of the community are using the Ulwazi database. If time had allowed, I would have been interested in determining how everyday people interact with Ulwazi's resources and for what reason. Do the communities feel like their traditions are being justifiably represented? Do they access these resources often? Since branch librarians are instrumental in introducing Ulwazi to local communities, their experiences would have perhaps been a better proxy for gauging social attitudes towards history and culture than learners and educators with no familiarity of the Ulwazi database.

A recurring hurdle throughout my ten-day duration in the field was the language barrier between myself, a native English speaker with only 4 weeks of elementary isiZulu under her belt, and several of the research subjects, whose first language was isiZulu. The language barrier reared its ugly head during the storytelling festival and monthly Ulwazi meeting, where the vast majority of what was said (70% and 50% respectively) was in isiZulu. Though nearly all of Ulwazi's content has some sort of English translation for each article, the translation is not direct and oftentimes much shorter than the isiZulu article. This was compensated for by leaning on participants and fellow audience members to repeat their words in English or else translate the words of another into English. Upon reflection, it would have perhaps been prudent to hire a translator for all or some of this research. One of the tenets of the oral tradition revival is the freedom to speak in one's mother tongue, a feature I had not anticipated. Though it perhaps detracted from the quality of the research, such a barrier seemed of little to no consequence in the greater scheme of a community attempting to restore its indigenous language confidence. Such a venture was met by wholesale applause on my part and I often hushed my own desire to know the meaning of what was being said out of respect of a persons' right to free, indigenous speech.

And though avoided when possible, the personal biases of the author inevitably tarnished her intention to represent the Ulwazi Programme and other initiatives in the most objective way possible. Since Ulwazi positions itself as a "knowledge management" project, with libraries serving as a defining model for the organization of indigenous knowledge, efforts by the researcher to locate strands of oral tradition amid the jargon of information systems might not always properly reflect the intentions of Ulwazi fieldworker's or support staff. Despite this, the research is guided by a conviction that orality and oral tradition are critical dimensions to the Ulwazi Programme that perhaps do not receive proper recognition by upper management. Beneath the mess of digital media are the roots of oral form and community dialogue and the following research is a strident effort to unearth those roots and bring them into the light.

FINDINGS

Oral Performance: The Storytelling Revolution of Gcina Mhlope

"I love sharing my stories with others and I also enjoy writing the down in books. But my favourite way of relating them is the ancient way of my people – telling them face to face, in front of a live audience. Oh the thrill of seeing the faces reacting to what you are saying, of feeling the energy go from storyteller to audience and back again!"

-Gcina Mhlope[57]

"Story is the mother of all art forms."

-Gcina Mhlope[58]

Traditions must no be longer confined to the fireside and kept within the intimate environment of the home and hearth, but given a public platform that garners national (and even global) clout and furthers a certain agenda. In South Africa, Gcina Mhlope is leading such a campaign. A world-renowned storyteller, poet, playwright, activist, actress, and author, Mhlope has brought her gift for oral performance to new and unprecedented heights. The sonorous quality of her voice earned her a broadcast post on Press Trust and BBC Radio and she burst onto the Durban theatre scene with her autobiographical play "*Have You Seen Zandile?"(1986).* She is credited with the revival of the African storytelling tradition and is widely published, with volumes that often tread the boundary between oral and written forms. "Love Child" (1996) is a collection of stories and poems that replicate the oral styling of South African *imbongis,* or praise poets. In recent years, Mhlope has published illustrated children's literature with a selection of African folktales. This includes "Molo Zoleka" (1994), "A Mother's Search for Stories" (1995), and "Stories of Africa" (2003), which has been reconverted back to oral form through audio CDs in both English and isiZulu.[59]

When I spoke with Mhlope over the phone, she was fresh off the plane from leading a motivational business workshop (with storytelling as her *modus operandi*) in Singapore. Mhlope explained that her early critics were sceptical of her oral approach. "Who's ever heard of a professional storyteller," they asked her, and Mhlope was more than willing to reply in kind with

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[57] Gcina Mhlope, author's note to *Stories of Africa*, by Gcina Mhlope (UKZN Press: Scottsville, 2004).
[58] Gcina Mhlope, personal interview by author, telephone, April 1, 2011.
[59] International Literature Festival Berlin, "Gcina Mhlope [South Africa]: Biography," *Internationales Literaturfestival Berlin*, http://www.literaturfestival.com/participants/authors/2005/gcina-mhlophe

a successful career. She is a living example of the marketability of oral tradition, its salience for audiences the world over, and malleability of stories to suit any venue. Her repertoire is antiquated, taken from the first stories she heard as a child from her grandmother, but its morals transcendent. "The stories are old, but the messages are the same," Mhlope commented and compared the fluidity of storytelling to that of liquid water. "You're drinking the same water as the dinosaurs. Stories are like that—flexible, taking different shapes, sizes, textures, and results."[60]

In order to witness the storytelling revolution of Mhlope for myself, I attended the "*Nozincwadi* 'Mother of Books' Book and Storytelling Festival at the Diakonia Center in central Durban. It is a two-day festival and capstone to Mhlope's reading road show, which combines public appearances/performances with book drives to encourage childhood literacy.[61] Many of the performers at the festival were fellow storytellers, poets, and oral performers who regaled the audience with their words, songs, stories, poems, and spoken words. Keeping in mind what Mhlope had told me over the phone about the audience-performer binary being a Western construct, I observed the dynamic of the storytelling festival as highly interactive and inclusive. The audience was as active of a participant as the performer. During folktales, the audience squealed, murmured, and groaned their approval at points of high drama. During songs, the audience rose to its feet to dance, providing percussive support through a clapped beat and vocal backing by singing along. Songs evoked call and response, cheering, and the blowing of penny whistles. When Madala Kunene was performing, one audience member at the back began to time his shouts to the rhythm of Kunene's music. He imitated a menagerie of animals, howling like wolf and chirping like a bird, to give texture to the performers vocalizations. Judging from the turned heads, the audience member was as equally a part of the performance as Kunene himself.

Orality seemed to allow for the give and take between speaker and listener in a way that the written word, frozen to the page, rendered impossible. According to Mhlope, however, books and oral tradition were a part of a mutually reinforcing cycle. Books were indispensible in reminding a community of its own cultural content and she did not consider the gulf between the oral and written such a vast one. "When you are retelling some book you are retelling a story,"

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[60] Mhlope, personal interview, April 1.

[61] *Nozincwadi* 'Mother of Books' Book and Storytelling Festival. Informal Interview and Observation. Diakonia Centre, Durban. April 15-15, 2011.

she proclaimed, "completing the circle from oral and written and back to oral and touching people's hearts." One of the audience members at the storytelling festival was a first grade educator from Glenwood. She regularly incorporated Mhlope's books into her teaching and claimed they gave students "the teachings of life." Such a statement is illuminating when one considers the purpose of the Ulwazi Project. Like the publications of Mhlope, it is a living document intended to be read by very same community that wrote it and in the process, remind the community of its own traditions.

The Ulwazi Programme

In order for Ulwazi to come into existence, oral tradition required verification on two levels. Firstly, indigenous knowledge in the form of stories, personal histories, rituals, and other traditions (which often exist in a strictly oral form) had to be considered salient enough to write down. Secondly, oral history had to be recognized as a legitimate resource through which the heritage of the local community could be conveyed. The words of ordinary people had to be deemed important enough to dedicate time, energy, and municipal resources to listen, record, and transcribe.

Moreover, after undergoing a process of digitization, the final version that these oral traditions had to be considered interesting and important enough to be re-read and re-heard. While scanning the official literature for Ulwazi, I was continually surprised by how seldom the role of the community was discussed. They seemed secondary to the final product of the website, a means to an e-library end, in a way that didn't sit right when the literature on oral tradition was so attentive to the "total social context" that encompassed a praise poem, song, or story. This research is motivated by a desire to restore the social context that lies quietly beneath an Ulwazi article and in the process, discover how the oral text changes with each telling. Behind the model of an indigenous library is a story of a community, several communities, who face the problem of disappearing local culture and *gogo* historians.

The Creation of the Ulwazi Programme

For Elizabeth Greyling (Betsie), the Senior Systems Librarian for the eThekwini Municipal Library, founder, and project leader of the Ulwazi Programme, the light bulb moment came at a 2006 conference in Tanzania on the theme of indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in

African libraries. While attending, Betsie became interested in the discipline of "knowledge management," a term used to describe the conscious strategy of an organization to collect, organize, disseminate, and analyze its information. This often took the form of written documents and records, used mostly for governmental or commercial purposes, and represent information that Betsie did not consider as "pure" as "tacit knowledge," or oral knowledge (i.e. "the knowledge in people's heads that is not written down" and passed down through generations by word of mouth). To rescue oral knowledge from the danger of extinction, Betsie saw an opportunity for local and indigenous communities to actively record and share their culture, history, and language through the creation of an indigenous digital library called the Ulwazi Programme (Zulu: "knowledge").[62] It is a solution that renowned libraries have been pursuing for many years (e.g. Smithsonian Institution's Centre for Folklore and Cultural Heritage and the New York Public Library's Schombrug Centre for Research on Black Culture), but has been three years in the making under the financial and structural umbrella of the eThekwini Muncipal Library Service (with Betsie at the helm). As custodians of information resources, Durban's public libraries seemed a suitable partner for facilitating the preservation of indigenous knowledge in a community-driven manner, contrary to the small elite groups that manage the handful of digital libraries and telecentres in other countries of Africa.[63] Betsie realized the untapped potential for indigenous knowledge resources to become a regular fixture of public library services and through digital communication technology, make a meaningful contribution to the global information society.

From this brush with knowledge management, Betsie dreamed up Ulwazi Programme in 2007 as an initiative of the eThekwini Municipal Library Services to preserve and disseminate the indigenous knowledge of local communities in the greater Durban area. In the early years, she confided that support was hard to come by within the eThekwini Municipal Library departments. Betsie ultimately turned to the IS department for seed money to set up a central programme office within the information systems department —a two-room facility with five computers—and to hire additional staff. This included the web/blog master, the go-to-IT-guy who assists with the mechanical and technical operations of Ulwazi's website, and the content

[62] Greyling, personal interview, April 28.
[63] Greyling, "Content Development," 3.

manager, who polishes the fieldworker's articles with additional research, light editing, and translation assistance.[64]

With the funds and infrastructure in place by March 2008, Betsie began to hold meetings with ward councillors and tribal authorities to introduce the program to local communities. Assisted by branch librarians when available, her team explained to the leaders the scope of the program, the kind of knowledge that would be posted on the Internet, and its non-commercial and voluntary format. Included in their pitch was an explanation of how the programme would benefit the community.[65] More than a Web portal with indigenous content of local merit, Ulwazi afforded contributors the chance to hone English language, computer literacy, and digital skills in the form of steady employment. It also purported to strengthen community ties by nurturing a "knowledge sharing culture" and fostering a sense of group identity. The community would become the provider and recipient of its own information, with the public library and social software technology serving as the interlocutors in a "model for community participation." [66]

Political and tribal authorities gave their formal permission for oral history research to be conducted in accordance with the terms and conditions outlined by Ulwazi. They assisted in the identification of potential fieldworkers from among active members of the community.[67] It was in late 2008 that Zanele, Bongiwe, and Nelisiwe, the first group of fieldworkers, were brought on board and the program has expanded since (ironically through word of mouth, the most tried and true of oral forms). The current roster of fieldworkers numbers six women and two men who represent mostly peri-urban areas (only two, Bongiwe and Zanele are in charge of the rural area of Umbumbulu). Once selected, fieldworkers are required to undergo a three-day training in the protocols of oral history research and ICT skills. Ulwazi's project leader, web master, and content manager lead tutorials in how to use a desktop computer, upload visual or audio information, and navigate the Ulwazi website for the purposes of posting new articles or adding new content to existing articles.

Once trained, fieldworkers are authorized to conduct independent oral history research in their respective residential areas and allowed to borrow cameras, tape recorders, and external memory drives from the Ulwazi offices for said purposes. Their methodology often takes the

[64] Greyling, personal interview, April 28.
[65] Greyling, "Content Development," 6.
[66] "Ulwazi: About."
[67] Greyling, "Content Development," 8.

form of an interview with one or several individuals knowledgeable about a given subject. The fieldworker captures oral information in an audio recording and visual information with a camera. For some specialized stories, especially those involving prominent members of the Durban-area populace, Ulwazi will assist fieldworks in conducting the interview on-camera and provide the necessary audio-visual equipment. This video will be posted to Vimeo, an online video platform, and embedded within the Ulwazi website. Subjects are debriefed beforehand about how the information they provide will be used by the Ulwazi Programme, with contributors signing a consent agreement to release the information for educational purposes only. The Ulwazi Programme operates under a Creative Commons license, a flexible copyright model that allows the organization to retain some rights and waive others. "We trust people," Betsie remarked, and insisted that in order for Ulwazi to succeed, the information must be freely volunteered by participants. Throughout our interview, she used libraries as an analogue for the organizing principles of the Ulwazi model and compared the digital system to that of any library catalogue:

> A library is there to organize knowledge, to organize the books. They don't write the books themselves, they don't demand the books be written. The same principal holds here.

What sets Ulwazi apart from the library template, however, is that the content of the "books" – 400 word articles on MediaWiki software—was not written solely for the purposes of being read. It first came from an oral exchange, originated in spoken word that may or may not leave traces in the structure and tone of the written product. During our interview, Betsie acquiesced that part of Ulwazi's indigenous knowledge management was "a recognition of the value of oral histories." It is an assemblage of historical detail from the personal perspective, "which you don't find in history books," and fills a niche in the which voices often ignored have the opportunity to be heard in written form. The community's involvement is the most striking and unique feature of the Ulwazi Programme. Though there is much to be said on the inventive use of library institutions and social software technology in the fulfilment of Ulwazi's goals, the following narrative will pay special attention to the third and most fundamental cornerstone of the Ulwazi model: the programme fieldworkers, community members, and the oral transmission that takes place between them.[68]

[68] Greyling, personal interview, April 28.

Into the Field with Sbo

In order to gain a better sense of where the content on the Ulwazi Memory database comes from, it was necessary to investigate the program from start to finish and trace the inception of a potential topic to its final manifestation on the Internet. For behind each of Ulwazi's online pages, pristinely typed between set margins, classified, and accompanied by a picture, there is a hidden story of a question posed by one member of the community to another. Somewhere within the vast expanse of things people say and do, something was isolated and identified as a potential fragment of historical, cultural, and environmental value. Somehow, a dialogue was initiated between an informant and an Uwazi fieldworker, persons with connections to the local communities both, but one asking questions and another providing answers for reasons that were not necessarily the same. Though oral speech has long been a vehicle for the communication of history and heritage, I wanted to know if Ulwazi conversations were fundamentally different. After all, with a pen in hand and a deadline approaching, the Ulwazi fieldworker listens for the purposes of transcription, translation, and documentation on the Internet. He or she is conducting an interview—one notch above formal conversation.

I was fortunate enough to spend a full day shadowing one of the Ulwazi Fieldworkers while conducting research in the INK area. Sbo is a 22-year-old media and communications student at the Durban University of Technology and an active member of the community. In addition to being employed at Ulwazi, he is a guide for the KZN Literary Tourism (a programme that holds walking tours of literary landmarks associated with Durban's famous writers and their works) and writes his own poetry. Nicknamed "Obama" by his friends for his uncanny ability to speak eloquently on any subject, Sbo expressed a strong appreciation for oral tradition and freedom of speech, especially in regard to journalism and a free press. "Everyone is a writer," he told me, before boarding the combi taxi to Inanda, and remarked that even an SMS message was a type of artistry. He dabbled in both oral and written expression, as easily comfortable performing his poetry at the BAT Centre as he was writing an article about Zulu marriage customs for Ulwazi, and was recognized as gifted writer and performer by both his peers and teachers.

Sbo was discovered by the web master of Ulwazi while teaching workshops for KZN Literary Tourism in Inanda. Due to his prior journalism experience, Sbo was added to the fieldworker roster in 2010 without undergoing any oral history training and has more formal

education than most of Ulwazi's other fieldworkers.[69] According to the Ulwazi website, Sbo wrote seven articles in March 2011 on a wide range of topics that included:

1. The Mzinyathi Falls, used by the Baptist Nazareth Church (Shembe) for baptisms[70]
2. Zulu "love letters," made out of beadwork to convey personal messages[71]
3. Zulu family customs, with mention of *ubuntu*, patriarchal family structures, and the greeting *sawubona*[72]
4. *Umlomo omnandi,* a medicine (Zulu: *muthi*) used to lure members of the opposite sex[73]
5. *Ukukapalatai*, a stomach illness caused by teething and treated with traditional medicine[74]
6. The process of paying lobola, or a bride price in cows[75]
7. *Ukuvusa komuzi*, a custom performed when a woman is struggling to conceive[76]

The first four of these articles were written in English, the remaining three in isiZulu, and rarely is there a citation of the interview subject who supplied this indigenous knowledge. The only exception is story #4, which makes mention of a *sangoma* in Warwick Junction who sells *umlomo omnandi*.[77] It is a pattern shared by many of the Ulwazi articles, which lack a firm policy of authorship and source citation that doesn't seem to be priority of the program. This is especially true of the articles under the "Culture" category, giving the knowledge the appearance that it has been magically lifted from the mass of community memory and like the contested authorship of *izibongi*, no single person or persons can claim ownership of that which is known in part by everybody. As Betsie put it, "How many times do you have to tell a story before it becomes common property?"[78] By this standard, the bulk of cultural knowledge on the Ulwazi database is considered "common property" and most of the articles are published in a format

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[69] Sbo Dladla, informal interview by author, Durban and INK areas, 14 April 2011.
[70] Sbo Dladla, "Mzinyathi Falls, Durban - KwaZulu-Natal," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Mzinyathi_Falls,_Durban_-_KwaZulu_Natal
[71] Sbo Dladla, "Love Letters," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Love_Letters
[72] Sbo Dladla, "Zulu Family Customs," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Zulu_Family_Customs
[73] Sbo Dladla, "Zulu Attraction Spell (Umlondo Omnandi)," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Zulu_Attraction_Spell_(Umlomo_Omnandi)
[74] Sbo Dladla, "Ukukapalata," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Ukukapalata
[75] Sbo Dladla, "Izinkomo Zamabheka," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Izinkomo_zamabheka
[76] Sbo Dladla, "Ukuvusa komuzi emndenini," *The Ulwazi Programme*, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Ukuvuswa_komuzi_emndenini
[77] A *sangoma* is diviner trained to communicate with and harness the powers of ancestors in diagnosing disease or mishap. He or she often uses herbal or other medicinal preparations to ease a client of his or her troubles.
[78] Greyling, personal interview, April 28th

identical to Sbo's below (Figure 1).[79] The lack of attribution of to a person or even a place (it isn't listed that Sbo or the story he gathered is from the INK) is of course misleading. If a story does not come from the fieldworker's own vault of personal knowledge, it must come from some person or place. My excursion into the field was for the purposes of reintroducing this crucial context to the final Ulwazi story.

On this particular Thursday, Sbo was travelling to see a *sangoma* named Ndumiso in Inanda to confer with him on a plant feared by snakes (Zulu: *shaladi*).[80] Sbo was put in touch with Ndumiso by a friend who worked for KZN Literary Tourism and sought him out for his expertise on indigenous uses for plants. When we finally arrived and were greeted by Ndumiso, the three of us spent a minute or two crouched down over the small seedling, adorned with purple flowers, and planted along the perimeter of the house to keep the snakes at bay. It turns out that most of the *shaladi* flowerbed had been uprooted and only this small sprig remained. Sbo pointed at the blade with a smile, asking if this is what I expected, and commented that indigenous knowledge was all around us. For him, his obligation to collect this knowledge went beyond a formal post at Ulwazi and was driven by a desire to "follow up with your roots." The capacity for self-definition through heritage was driven home while in lecture at DUT, when one of his professors told him the meaning of a Zulu custom Sbo did not know. Horrified by his own ignorance, Sbo took the experience as evidence of how the past is part and parcel to the realization of a person's future and one's ability of lead a full life. "You should never be told your culture by someone on the outside, someone who isn't even a part of it," he claimed and took the experience in stride as fuel for his fieldwork. Sbo's personal philosophy seemed to correspond with the overriding mission of the Ulwazi Programme that the community should take pride in its own knowledge base.

[79] There are exceptions of course. For instance, a fairy tale called "Ukubaluleka kwezinganekwane" lists the name of the interviewer, interviewee, venue, location, and date the interview took place.
Nelisiwe Hlongwane, "Ukubaluleka kwezinganekwane," The Ulwazi Programme, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Ukubaluleka_kwezinganekwane

[80] All the following content is taken from informal interview and observation by author of Sbo and Ndumiso, Inanda, Durban, April 14, 2011.

ULWAZI
SHARING INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

ENVIRONMENT HISTORY CULTURE

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Ukukapalata

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Ukukapalata yisifo esiphatha abantwana uma besaqhumisa abathakathi (amazinyo). Kunenkolelo yokuthi akufanele abizwe ngamazinyo ngoba kungaqhubeleka phambili ukufa. Kufana noma umntwana enesifo senyongo nayo inyongo kuthiwa imbi noma umthakathi ukuze ukufa kungaqhubekeli phambili. Lesisifo siyelapheka kodwa kuyehluka ngokwabantu lapha sozobheka imithi enjengomgwava nomsilimbuzi. Umntwana ugxotshelwa amahlamvu ale mithi kuhlanganiswe namanzi achathwe ngayo. Lemithi ifike isishubise isisu, umntwana aphile.

Umntwana uphuziswa ibomvu, aphinde achathwe ngalo uma abadala besola ukuthi umntwana unesilonda. Uma ingane ikapalata ichathwa ngemithi yokushubisa, imithi yobisi kanti ingafakwa umphuphutho wengwavuma nendalucwatha. Indalucwatha isiza kakhulu uma ingane ivimbene iyaqugudwa bese ifuthwa ngayo emakhaleni yenziwe isichonco iphuziswe ingane. Indalucwatha umuthi omkhulu wemimoya. Ingane ike iphathwe isilonda kanti sesixubene nemimoya. Iyasiza kakhulu indalucwatha, iyagxotshwa ifakwe emanzini umntwana achathwe ngayo.

Uma umntwana esedlulile kulesikhathi uyaye aqale adle ukudla okuqinile. Umama womntwana uma enamandla ubonga abaphansi ngenkukhu emhlophe, ukufisela umzukulu wabo okumhlophe ekukhuleni kwakhe. Uma umntwana engaqinile kahle kuyaye kushiswe izinyamazane kushwelezwe kwabaphansi. Lapho umntwana usuke eselungiselwa isigaba esilandelayo lapho esezofunda ukuhamba (ukuchathuza).

English Summary: Ukukapalata (Stomach bug caused by teething)

When a child is born it goes through different stages of sicknesses and there are different ways that Zulu people treat these sicknesses. the most common one is a stomach bug caused by teething. and most Zulu people believe in ancestors in most of the things. The mother of the child have to seek help if she is not familiar with traditional medicines. In some communities there are old people who specialises in children sicknesses. some treat this with red soil which is crushed into fine sand and they mix it with water and administer an enema and it can also be drunk. However, it is crucial to observe the amount of the red soil used to a child since it may be harmful when is overdosed. Result of misuse of the red soil may lead to a child being terminally ill. Some people believe that it is important to thank the ancestors when the child is better by slaughtering a white hen to thank and ask them to look after their grandchild.

By: Sbo Dladla

Categories: Traditional medicine | Imithi yesintu | Traditional Healing | Ukwelapha ngesintu | Abelaphi bendabuko

Figure 1. Ukukapalata. Sbo's article about a stomach illness in children does not list the name of the community member who provided the information.

As for Ndumiso, he was not what one imagined for a traditional *sangoma* in the slightest. He was 23-years-old, young as far as most traditional healers go, and wearing a Bafana Bafana soccer jersey and brown slacks. The beaded headdress that is the signature attire of a *sangoma* was only donned when he was consulting with a client or communicating with the ancestors, deceased relatives whose approval determines the well being of their kin. Before enjoying an audience with Ndumiso, Sbo and I were introduced to a living room full of visitors who lived within the Inanda area and had also come for the purposes of speaking with the young *sangoma*. They were looking to establish a public health service that would go door to door treating and educating members of the community about infectious and chronic diseases. The image of a *sangoma* and community health worker seated cordially side by side, in partnership with each other's cause, was surprising. It dismantled the polarity between traditional healing and Western medicine that is often upheld by the juxtaposition of herbal medicine, or *muthi*, with chemical

drugs and injections. Though a doctor may treat a gunshot wound, he cannot protect someone from it bullets in the same way a traditional healer can.[81]

And yet, in spite of their differing techniques, here in Inanda the two health practitioners sat side by side. In a *sangoma's* own household, there was a public health worker enlisting the *sangoma's* support in a grassroots campaign. At their vocational core, both were involved in the business of healing and their collaboration dismantled the wall that often separates tradition and modernity. If Ndumiso's work could be adapted to assist a community health campaign, than was he a traditional healer in a "traditional" sense? Could he be considered a credible source for an Ulwazi article? Speaking with the two individuals—healers both—I suspected that indigenous knowledge, of the kind that is prefigured to exist by the Ulwazi superstructure, might be complicated by its regular interaction with so-called "modern" knowledge (a troublesome distinction). This destabilizes the assumption that oral traditions exists in a kind of pre-colonial, hermeneutically sealed package that a brave fieldworker must find buried beneath layers of alien influence. Since oral traditions change with every telling, it makes perfect sense that the most recent "version," as told by a community member to a fieldworker, will have absorbed new ideas and influences that were not present in the version that might have been delivered a generation ago. Indigenous knowledge is not static, but like the water metaphor used by Mhlope to describe stories, constantly transformed and informed by whatever is on the mind and tongue of the community where the knowledge is imported, exported, and subject to change.

When we finally settled in to Ndumiso's consulting room, I let Sbo take the interview lead. Perhaps it was the hallowed nature of the space we were in, a portal where ancestral activity was generated on a daily basis, but the nature of their conversation was subdued and respectful. Sbo asked only a few questions and waited patiently for Ndumiso to provide the answers. He wanted to know precisely how *shaladi* grass inhibited the passage of snakes and whether *shaladi* had any medicinal purposes. Ndumiso explained that every herb could be employed for its own specialized remedy, using the example of a guava to treat an upset stomach, and that each *sangoma* mixed these herbs into remedies the ancestors supplied him in dreams. Before *shaladi* was discussed, an overview of his craft was the first order of business. Perhaps it was my presence, an American student with limited knowledge, that compelled

[81] Adam Ashforth (2005), *Witchcraft, Violence, and Democracy in South Africa*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Ndumiso to introduce his response with a lesson in *sangoma*-lore, but it could also have been a feature of his speech. Many of the people we spoke with that day were long-winded and generous with their words, taking time and loquacious care to arrive at their point. This marginal richness comes with the territory of storytelling, in which the speaker can sway from topic to topic in a steady stream that is freshly realized each time. By the time Ndumiso finally answered Sbo's question, the answer seemed anti-climatic in comparison to the wealth of knowledge that prefaced his response. It turns out that the *taste* of *shaladi* was adverse to a snake and had no medicinal properties that Ndumiso knew of. He couched his response with passing reference to the incontestable wisdom of the ancestors and years of practice. "I'm telling you the truth on the traditional healer's side," he concluded.

When it comes to oral tradition, "truth" is not definitive and cannot be ratified through comparisons to a written document. Truth is relative to the speaker and objective insofar as it is a subjective to his or her experiences and opinions. This can create problems on the Ulwazi database when several fieldworkers come forward with different versions of the same story. Since stories cannot be repeated, only added to an already existing page set aside for that topic, there is a danger for highly specific, subjective, and local truths to be considered universally true for all places and who people. Ndumiso's explanation of *shaladi* might not be same as that of a neighbouring *sangoma*, a *sangoma* in Warwick Junction, a *gogo*, or a young boy. Furthermore, the explanation Ndumiso gave on that day might not be identical with the explanation he would have given a year earlier or a year later if asked the same questions. Though the Ulwazi database has some provisions for relaying the social context that surrounded the interview, such as listing the fieldworker and community member's name, the interview location, date, and time, these are not uniformly enforced. And even if they were, it is impossible to say what other microscopic yet critical features of the interview, such as body language, room temperature, comfort level, and other non-verbal and/or sensory cues, affected the words Ndumiso used to answer Sbo's inquiry. His "indigenous knowledge" should not be seen a stock response in isolation of other factors, but should be considered a product of an incomprehensible total social context that is beyond the purview of an technology, print, digital, or otherwise, to replicate.

With the *shaladi* question out of the way, Sbo opened the floor to my own questions and sat back watching the two of us interact. It was an inversion of the methodological approach I had originally intended, in which I would be observing Sbo in his research, but seized the

opportunity nonetheless out of a fear of appearing disinterested. Moreover, both Sbo and Ndumiso seemed to shift the flow of the conversation to comply with my curiosities and the group dynamic rapidly changed from one where Sbo, as the fieldworker, and I, as the participant observer, switched roles. Ndumiso remained the subject of the interview and went into rich detail about his practice. He described how the word *sangoma* had become a commercial term that any vendor at Warwick took leave to post on to their stand and that the discipline was rife with corruption, fraud, and abuse. This has forced Ndumiso to adapt to an increasingly competitive market of traditional healing and fix a new crop of physical, psychological, and social problems. People come forward wanting their headaches cured, their empty wallets filled, and their unrequited love returned. Though Ndumiso occupied a role that was classified as "traditional," he did not rely on tried-and-true forms of healing and was continually inventing new herbal preparations that were in tune with the present needs of his community. For community members such as Ndumiso, who are sought out by Ulwazi as guardians of a certain type of knowledge, their roles are not nearly as traditional or indigenous as the gospel of "indigenous knowledge" seems to suggest, but as modern as that of any doctor or medical practitioner.

The road to becoming a *sangoma* is also one fraught with difficulty and Ndumiso went into elaborate detail about his own journey. The powers of a *sangoma* run in families. A prospective initiate receives his or her calling in the form of dreams, illness, and invasive visions from the ancestors. For Ndumiso, the first person to recognize this was his Afrikaans teacher. She noticed that he was unable to do his work in class and brought his poor performance to the attention of his parents. Ndumiso relayed these events in vivid detail and described the frustration of sitting in class. "Nothing was going to get through my eyes and mind. I would take a pen and hold it sill. My mind was blank." A silence followed, as if to portray through sound (or the lack thereof) the paralysis that overcame Ndumiso when handed a pen and paper and given the task to write.

Resonating with Walter Ong's depiction of writing as "technology," Ndumiso's struggle with literacy is profound example of the incommunicability between oral and written forms. Though an eloquent speaker, his inability at age 16 to express himself through the written word was admonished within the system of a formal education. Ndumiso's illiteracy set apart him apart from the rest of his classmates and signalled to his family that he was destined for another career entirely, with an alternative education (i.e. initiation schools for healers in training) that

did not depend on the mastery of written language. Though a minor detail to his story, it nonetheless substantiates the theoretical claim that illiteracy sends a particular kind of social message and confines a person to a particular kind of social role. [82]

One night, Ndumiso dreamed of a strange house and awoke screaming, attempting to sleep walk to this imagined edifice. His mother recognized his hallucinatory outburst as a sign that ancestors were carrying him towards the doorstep of a traditional healer and along with Ndumiso's grandmother, brought him to a traditional healer for evaluation. "You have ancestors who want to give you what they had," the traditional healer told him. After dropping out of school in 2004 ("The ancestors did not want me to pass my matric"), Ndumiso underwent proper training under the healer's mentorship. The initiation school was expensive, costing his mother and father R3000 and a cow (totalling R6000-R7000), but after seven years of instruction, Ndumiso was initiated through ritual means to become a fully-fledged *sangoma.*

Ndumiso's story is a fascinating example of how indigenous knowledge—specifically medicinal knowledge—continues to be passed down orally from one generation to another. His was another slowly unpacked story that unfolded in non-chronological order and bumped up against the vocal tics and body language of Sbo and myself. It was by no means formulaic, but riddled with side stories that were unique to Ndumiso's experience. The beauty of community-driven oral history is that it lends itself to this kind of specificity and gives dignity to the human voice. Even in my written retelling, countless details of the storytelling did not survive and the quirks of Ndumiso's delivery could not be replicated.

I also noticed how my methodology differed from Sbo's in a way that rendered our two experiences of the story differently. While I furiously scribbled into a note pad and glanced up at Ndumiso sporadically, Sbo crossed his legs and leaned back on his palms, listening intently. He did not use a note pad, tape recorder, or any other digital technology that I so frantically depended upon. Between the two of them, the reliance on memory that is part and parcel to oral transmission was sustained. Ndumiso spoke from memory and Sbo listened for the purposes of remembering (while I listened for the purpose of transcription). The fundamental difference between our research methodologies made me question my assertion that Ulwazi fieldworkers solicited members of the community for their tacit knowledge first and foremost. Sbo did not

[82] It is unfounded to suggest that the career of a *sangoma* is a coping mechanism for failure to achieve in a society that places a high premium on reading and writing. However, the connection between traditional healing and standards of literacy would be worthwhile subject to explore.

take notes, made a point in respecting the person providing him the information, and had taken the time to establish a relationship with Ndumiso prior to the interview.

The dynamic was not identical to the audience and performer interaction at the *Nozincwadi* Book Festival; Sbo was leading a formal interview, asking direct questions, and listening for specific information. He kept his emotions at a distance and was less participatory than the audience spellbound by Mhlope's perforamce. Nonetheless, the truth according to Ndumiso was never challenged or invalidated through the mention of what Sbo already knew about *shaladi*. He listened willingly and with interest, responding with flexibility to whatever Ndumiso offered, and seemed to respect the young *sangoma* as an individual first, informant second.

It turns out that Sbo and I were not the only researchers to have sought Ndumiso's council before. Western doctors and medical practitioners, hoping to know how traditional healers used herbal remedies for the treatment of HIV/AIDS, had also paid a visit to his doorstep. Ndumiso described this interaction as one-sided and claimed he did not gain anything through the interaction. "It's like throwing away a piece of my a talent without getting anything in return," he explained, and said that fellow traditional healers might frown upon his full and open disclosure of oral traditions to Western doctors and researchers. When asked if such opinions bothered him or visitors from outside the community upset his practice, Ndumiso denied both assertions. Before receiving the call to become a *sangoma*, he wanted to be a tour guide and took pleasure in sharing indigenous knowledge with those new to the Durban-area. One of the promising features of the Ulwazi Programme is that the global exposure of local communities will boost the tourism industry. [83] When it comes to oral tradition, the speaker/knowledge-giver and listener/knowledge-recipient must be in the same location at the same time in order for the transaction to be successful. This is not the case with an indigenous e-library such as Ulwazi, which archives the knowledge into perpetuity and can be retrieved by anyone at any time or place, even by people beyond the pale of the local community. Of the 36,055 visits Ulwazi received between November 2009 and November 2010, 21% came from outside of South Africa. Representing 146 other countries, the United States and the United Kingdom represented the greatest number of visits.[84]

[83] Greyling, "Content Development," 14.
[84] Google Analytics, 4.

With this in mind, Ndumiso's comment is astonishing. It suggests that in order for a community member to willingly contribute his knowledge, to offer the story, song, or herbal concoction for the purposes of publication, he or she must see the value in sharing this knowledge with an invisible audience. He or she must have the mindset of a tour guide, mediating the wild jungles of oral tradition into comprehensible terms that can be understood outside their local context. There was no way of determining how much Ndumiso was adapting his words to meet what he imagined to be the needs of Sbo and myself. Furthermore, he chose his words in full understanding that whatever was said would be eventually jotted down, splashed in the Internet, and hurled into research papers for non-medicinal purposes. Like the publications and business trainings of Gcina Mhlope, oral tradition is being broadcast beyond the boundaries of its origin and is being appropriated for alternative needs.

After departing ways with Ndumiso, Sbo took me to one of his favourite locations on the Inanda Heritage Trail: the Ohlange Institute (Figure 2). It is the final resting place the Reverend John Dube and historical site where Nelson Mandela cast his first ballot in the democratic election of 1994. Though hallowed space, the museum was falling into disrepair and deserted. The guestbook was dominated by tourists from abroad, with nary the name of an Inanda local in sight. Sbo conversed at length with the Ohlange Institute direct and museum curator, whom he regarded as a close personal friend and colleague who shared his love of history and reverence for ANC freedom fighters. Both were disillusioned by what they considered the reckless behaviour of today's generation. Motioning to the nearby public library, where he spent the majority of his time when not attending classes or poetry circles in Central Durban, Sbo said that these historical sites offered him refuge from the hardships of township life. They were the only places where he felt connected to the township of Inanda, where he, his mother, and two sisters moved in 2008 to escape the crime in KwaMashu. He mentioned that he often felt unwelcome by the people of Inanda, who considered his university education, city life, and wealthy friends as emblematic of betrayal or arrogance. It was an interesting twist of fate that Sbo, the designated point person for INK, should feel at odds with the very community he was hired to represent. As a person who worked and studied in the city, but lived in a township, he straddled two identities. Perhaps this why he was well equipped to be an Ulwazi fieldworker: as a local to Inanda, he had already made in-roads with various community figures and circles, but with obligations to Durban institutions (i.e. DUT, Ulwazi), he could maintain his objectivity and look upon his

township as an object of study. Such disassociation seemed to cost Sbo a sense of belonging and he admitted that without a research task to carry out, he felt uneasy coming back to Inanda.

Figure 2. Sbo at the Ohlange Institute, where Nelson Mandela cast his first ballot.

Storytelling Circle

As we bid farewell, Sbo told me he planned on going home to type up the information that had been gained from today's conversation. All interviews and field research must ultimately be reworked into a written format in order to qualify for posting and payment. Each fieldworker receives a R300 stipend per Ulwazi article (or "story"), intended to cover transportation and the occasional phone call, and can bring in a maximum of three stories a month. These are shared with the entire Ulwazi family at a review meeting held the last Thursday of every month, a vibrant parlay of storytelling, which also serves as the due date for database content. I had the opportunity to sit in their April 2011 meeting, which will be henceforth be referred to as a "storytelling circle" due to its oral nature. Going around in a circle, each fieldworker read from

his or her notebook the stories that had been collected for the month. In a mash-up of isiZulu and English, the literate representation of the oral was being transformed back into oral form once again. It demanded an oral literacy, testing the fieldworker's abilities to faithfully repeat (with the help of written notation) the information supplied by an unmentioned community member. The storytelling circle is a crucial step in the Ulwazi process that is not often visible to the public. It is a brief moment in which an oral text receives an oral reiteration once again, but this time in the form of a report for Ulwazi management (i.e. the project leader and content manager) rather than an interview. While sitting in the circle, I tried to observe the interaction between the fieldworkers, content manager, and Betsie, the project leader, to identify which modes of expression allowed the party to arrive at the most conclusive version of a potential Ulwazi story.

Figure 3. Ulwazi's monthly review meeting is a roundtable discussion that invites group participation

The storytelling circle took place in a large room adjacent to the computer lab at a square table, surrounded by plastic chairs (Figure 3). The environment was a casual one, almost sociable, that involved the fieldworkers reconnecting with one another and swapping stories over rounds of biscuits and tea. Several voices were coming together at once and continued to bounce off one another during the meeting. When the time came for each person to share his or her

stories, other group members would chime in with head nods, points of clarification, additional details, negations of other details, and further storytelling. These interruptions, incursions, and contributions can be interpreted as an attempt by the Ulwazi staff to whittle indigenous information down to a size that all in the group could agree was the most correct, comprehensive, and fit for publication. If the interview is the primary source and the transcription a first draft, the storytelling circle is the editing – a kind of "oral editing" - that takes place before the final written version. The content manager, the only isiZulu speaker among the Ulwazi's upper management, played an especially active role in refining the fieldworker's raw data. During the meeting, she entreated the fieldworker's to elaborate on various aspects of the story, such as the use communal taps by the residents of Cato Manor under apartheid and the specifics of a cleaning ritual for a woman who had miscarried. She even brought out a Zulu dictionary to assist a fieldworker in finding the proper English words to describe hunting dogs. In this instance, the communal ethos of an oral setting lent itself to the modification of indigenous knowledge. Sometimes this resulted in the inclusion of exogenous information that was not original to the community member's story. While Nqobile was describing the *umsenge*, a tree made out of sturdy bark to construct kraals, Betsie asked her whether she was aware that the wood was poisonous to cook on. Such a detail made it to the published version on the Ulwazi database.

For every addition to the story, there were countless exclusions. This was made rapidly apparent when the time came for Sbo to share the story of the *shaladi* plant. He hadn't yet written up the story, planning to use it in next month's cycle of content, and provided a concise overview of *shaladi's* major talking points without any mention of Ndumiso or the full day spent in his company. It was a story stripped of its trappings; only the bare bones information was repeated and survived to live another telling. Extending the metaphor of "oral editing," the storytelling circle is meant to simplify the story and clarify it to a fine, intelligible point. The lovely back-story is lost to memory.[85]

[85] Ulwazi monthly review meeting, informal interview and observation, eThekwini Muncipal Library Services, April 18, 2011.

Interview with Nelisiwe

Following the review meeting, the content manager and the fieldworkers split off to work at various computer stations in the Central Programme Office. The rest of the day was spent assembling the raw data from notepads, audio recorders, and cameras into articles to meet Ulwazi's post-production requirements: 400 words, bilingual translation, with a title, picture, and proper categorization (Figure 4). It was in this window of time the following interview took place. Nelisiwe's interview took the form of a recorded conversation of 60 minutes in length and is included to illustrate how her fieldwork and experience within her local community differed from Sbo's.

Figure 4. The "Indigenous Knowledge" computer laboratory where stories are digitized

Nelisiwe is a veteran of the Ulwazi Programme and has been involved since its inception in 2008. She is in her early 40s and resides in the rural area of Hammersdale, in a town called Ntsongweni, where she works for a literacy campaign that teaches older women how to write. Like Sbo, Nelisiwe's literacy allows her juggle several jobs that other members of her community cannot perform. As with all inducted Ulwazi fieldworkers, she has achieved a certain

standard of formal education through the metric level. Throughout our conversation, she did not hint at experiencing the same level of alienation as Sbo, but described the reception of the community to her work as one of warmth and reciprocity.

When asked to describe her favorite article on the Ulwazi Database, Nellie launched into a full retelling of Demane and Demazane, a children's story (Zulu: *Izindaba zezingane*) about two sisters from a poor family who were duped by a clever bird. Rather than provide an abridged version, Nellie recited the full story in all its cause-and-effect repetition and playful cadences. The story was her grandmother's, one of many she heard as a child when her cousins, sister, and herself were all expected to be home by 5 o'clock. 5 o'clock was storytelling hour, the designated time when they would sit with their grandmother and listen to her spell binding tales. No two stories were the same and each had a moral lesson, some Nellie has been able to take with her into adulthood. "Some guide me in the way. Some help me a lot, because they are stories that make you to be brilliant," she explained. When the time came to commit her grandmother's story to the pages of Ulwazi however, the listening process was different from that of a wide-eyed, slack-jawed child. For one, the story came from her aunt, who as an older person had a better memory for fairy tales. Nellie had no way of recalling this childhood memory by herself, but through the participation of a family member, could paint, brushstroke by brushstroke, the completed story of Demane and Demazane as told so skillfully by her grandmother. She copied her aunt word for word and after verifying the truthfulness of the transcription, published a verbatim account of her Grandmother's story in the words of her aunt.[86]

The published version on the Ulwazi website totals 409 words and accompanied by a picture of a large black bird.[87] It follows the storytelling conventions of Gcina Mhlope's work, introducing the story with "*Kwesukasukela*" (It happened a long time ago) and ending with "*Cosi Cosi Yaphela*" (Here I rest my story).[88] Reflecting on the experience, Nellie asserted the veracity of an older person's account, stating that the elderly never lied and that "All that they are telling you is true…the old person talk the true every time." Nellie deeply appreciated and valued such conversations and worried that children were not speaking enough to their grandparents.

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[86] Nelisiwe Hlongwane, personal interview, eThekwini Muncipal Library Services, April 18, 2011.
[87] Nelisiwe Hlongwane, "Udemane no Demazane," The Ulwazi Programme, http://wiki.ulwazi.org/index.php5?title=Udemane_no_Demazane
[88] Gcina Mhlope, *Stories of Africa*, (UKZN Press: Scottsville, 2004), pg. 5.

When the conversation turned to oral traditions and stories that were forbidden or expunged from the Ulwazi database, she said that stories with sensitive or polarizing content were "not helpful." Politics were another area where a fieldworker had to tread cautiously. When Jacob Zuma paid a visit to Hammarsale, Nellie wrote up a story about the "event" (a recognized category under the Ulwazi folksonomy) and brought in pamphlets with information about the ANC. Her story was reportedly turned away on the grounds that it endorsed a particular political party.[89] When I brought this issue to Betsie, asking whether stories of a political nature were permitted on the Ulwazi space, she explained these terms in full:

> "We cannot let politics interfere in this database. As part of history, yes, because it is a part of history, as you find in any book, but it must always be from the personal perspective. We cannot allow the site to become a platform for political issues to be debated. That is not the place for it.[90]

In other words, politics needed to be historicized in order for it to qualify as indigenous knowledge. This is particularly problematic in the case of South Africa, a 17-year-old democracy still in its infancy where the major players in the anti-apartheid struggle, such as the ANC, remain a powerful political force. Where can the line be drawn between tradition and modernity when the parties of yore still capture the majority of the votes? While one cannot compare the ANC of Nelson Mandela with that of the current president Jacob Zuma, they are member to an identical party whose current manifestations are of historical relevance. Oral tradition is not a prurient form solely limited to fairy tales, but given what we already know, thickly charged with the concerns of people today. This is an uneasy tension that underpins the Ulwazi database, but has been mitigated by the inclusion of a "community blog," one tab away from the "community memory database" to release local news pieces generated by the fieldworks, highlight new database submissions, and other developments at Ulwazi. Though this might give the appearance of Ulwazi as platform within the community's full right to control, it doesn't change the fact that all articles must receive a final stamp of approval from management.

While the Ulwazi fieldworkers are the heart and soul of the project, providing the raw data from the local community, management supplies the institutional support and technical know-how to prepare that data to be read outside of the community. The requirements that all stories have a picture, are put under a folksonomic category, or are translated into English/Zulu are

[89] Hlongwane, personal interview, April 18.
[90] Greyling, personal interview, April 28.

retroactive attributes designed to make the information universally accessible. They compensate for the fact that an online user, visiting what will be the Ulwazi page dedicated to *shaladi*, might not be familiar with the Zulu language, traditional medicine, or even be able to envision what the *shaladi* plant might look like. Consequently, Ulwazi must compensate for this missing context through categorization, translation, and visual aid. While these features are informative, they should not be mistaken for the in-person oral context that comes from having heard the story in its native environment and moreover, the ability for follow up questions and interactive exchange. The discussion threads that accompany each article are underused and since the community members who supplied the information might not have access to a computer, their voices are not a part of the dialogue that circulates around an Ulwazi article.

From our interview, I also discerned a substructure to Ulwazi that was gently guiding the nature of the content. When asking Nellie where she got her stories ideas from, she pulled down the organization charts used to group Ulwazi's content (see Appendices A-C). Nellie was aware of the types of stories Ulwazi was looking for, leaving me to wonder if she adjusted her research to concern itself with stories she knew would be acceptable. If so, this would suggest that the database was partially guided by top-down strictures. In an ideal (perhaps unattainable) world, a "model for community participation" would not have to refer to guidelines on Excel sheets, but could bend and flex in accordance with knowledge the community wished share. Though rich in content, the Ulwazi database falls slightly short of this ideal. The community participates insofar as it supplies the "knowledge," but when it came to "management," it appeared there were several other non-community hands involved in helping the fieldworkers write their stories.

Unlike Sbo, Nellie was overwhelmingly positive about the community's response to the Ulwazi Programme. She said that her tape recorder and notepad lent her work a degree of professionalism, demonstrating to the community that its memories and oral traditions were valuable enough to record. The concrete nature of literacy, once again, seemed to authenticate oral tradition. When it was made clear to participants that this information would be appearing online and published, knowledge was given all the more freely and openly. It earned its fieldworker an excess of three stories a month, invitations to return at any time, and high praise when she shared the final article on a mobile phone. It opened doors to people and places she did not have access to otherwise. Nellie proudly clicked through pictures on Ulwazi's camera screen of her fieldwork on a game reserve, where she was researching wildlife, and spoke

enthusiastically about her interview with Gcina Mhlope, a personal hero also able to travel and meet new people on the wings of oral tradition. These conversations allowed her to compare the past and present realities of the Hammersdale area, occasionally with jarring epiphanies that transcend generational boundaries. Nellie realized, for instance, that both she and a community member many years her senior did not have access to cars. After writing about how this person walked long distances to work, Nellie caught herself making the very same journey on foot. She said she was saddened by how little had changed in the rural parts of South Africa.

For her most recent story on the ceremony in the Garden of NomKhubulwane, Nellie described her interviewee, a Ms. MaNdlovu of Ntshangwe, as painfully shy. She had never been to school before and was uncertain of her own authority on a topic she feared had little bearing outside of the rural community. " 'But I know nothing about NomKhublwane'," Nellie replied. "'Yes, I've got matric, but I know nothing about NomKhulwane.'' With this admission, Nellie earned her subject's trust and endowed Ms. MaNdlovu with ownership of valuable knowledge. She entered into the same oral contract as Sbo, empowering the community member to speak and yielding to his or her expertise on the subject. Only then, Nellie put it, could Ms. MaNdlovu, "feel free" – free to speak, free to claim, and free to share what she knew. Furthermore, as with Ndumiso, the barrier of literacy was overcome by the strictly oral nature of the interaction, allowing Ms. MaNdlovu to contribute to the Ulwazi database without having to ever take up the pen herself. Nellie described how in the process of oral history research, it was necessary to "humble yourself to a person:"

> You must humble yourself to a person. If we respect each another there is nothing wrong. To humble yourself you can find everything that you want. Because if you claim you know everything, the person can run away with the thing that can help.

As much as humility and sensitivity are rules of thumb in oral history research, they are also elements of the social environment that is required in order for word-of-mouth to thrive. People must make an effort to seek one another out, often travelling great distances, and be willing to actively listen to one another with open ears. For Nelisiwe, fieldwork was the most rewarding aspects of the Ulwazi model and the reason she's continued to stay for so many years. Asked why she chose the job in the first place, she replied, "I liked the Ulwazi project because it involves me with people. I like the old people."[91]

[91] Nelisiwe Hlongwane, personal interview, eThekwini Muncipal Library Services, April 18, 2011.

Social Attitudes Towards South African History: Perspectives of Menzi High School

In my conversations with Betsie and the Ulwazi fieldworkers, the *why* question of the programme – why its operation is worth sustaining, why indigenous knowledge should be compiled, why the local community should involve itself in the creation of a digital library – was often met with the same momentously self-evident answer: its for the children. In the romantic preservationist rhetoric that walks hand in hand with many heritage projects, "children" are an instantiation of the imagined readership that will benefit from the fruits of today's conservation efforts. Some day, in the future, Durban's Westernized, urbanized, corporatized, and secularized children are going to want to know where they come from, only to find that access to their historical and cultural roots has been lost to the voices of the past. The oral link that runs between kin will have disintegrated: eroded by the wear and tear of poverty, rural-urban migration, HIV/AIDS, and the decentralization of family life. The Ulwazi Programme makes no claim that the coming years will be quite this grim. However, a certain fear that indigenous knowledge is slipping through society's fingers most certainly informs their work with a sense of urgency.

According to Betsie, the project leader, an upcoming goal of Ulwazi is to introduce the programme to a number of Durban Metro Schools to supplement the history curriculum and encourage computer skills. She envisioned that teachers could assign a topic that required online research. In the process, students could learn how to browse the literature of the database, a "body of knowledge for their environment," and through Ulwazi's recognition of isiZulu search terms, "cross the barrier" that often precludes Zulu speakers from using an English-heavy Internet.[92]

Given the destined place of children in the trajectory of the Ulwazi project, it was only fitting to seek out such a group of young people and gather their thoughts on the relevance of oral history. Menzi High School, a historically African school in the township of Umlazi seemed a natural candidate. History classes are offered for learners from grade 8 through grade 12, computer access has been available since 2002 through a donation by Telkom, and the school is

[92] Greyling, personal interview, April 7.

one of highly achieving, motivated students.[93]For the past decade, Menzi's metric pass rates have continually closed in around 100%.[94] Menzi correlated with many of the typographic indicators that are suitable for a joint programme with Ulwazi. Through SIT's connection with the school, I was able to carry out a daylong research project on their premises. This took the shape of two focus groups, one between two history educators and an English educator and another between twelve 10th-12th-grade learners. Half of the conversation was dedicated to the value of knowing one's cultural and historical roots and the other half to the digitization of knowledge in general, using Ulwazi as a primary example. The student group was treated as an open discussion between peers in which the power differential between the learners and myself was minimized. The group was highly interactive. More than half of the students were members of the English Academy, an intensive English writing, reading, and debating club that meets twice a week under the supervision of the several of the educators. Out of a respect for oral integrity and to process the free-form exchange of opinions that took place, I have decided to put several of their opinions in direct quotes.

Shooting the Boer or Shooting the Breeze

Mr. Hlomgwa teaches both world history and South African history for grades 10, 11, and 12, while Mr. Mncwabe is a student teacher from UNISA.[95] When posing the question as to whether history was a topic of interest for young people, the answer was an adamant "yes" and justified by a recent example: the singing of "Shoot the Boer" by ANC Youth League President Julius Malema. An anti-apartheid anthem of the 1980s, the song has also been described as form of hate speech against the Afrikaner population and a sore point after the murder of white separatist leader Eugene Terreblanche. For Hlomgwa, Malema's singing of "Shoot the Boer" (a piece of oral tradition if you will) demonstrated the legacy of history in the political atmosphere of today. He considered the song a "figure of speech" that had been misconstrued as a blatant message of attack, when in fact it was empowering black South Africans to come together as a people. Mr. Mncwabe agreed. "It's a part of our heritage, so we cannot dispose of it," he added, and it is a heritage that neither educator wishes to water down for his students. Mr. Hlomgwa

[93] Kathlyn Patillo, "From Failing to Effective: Principal Mshololo and the Transformation of Teaching at Menzi High School," *ISP Collection*, (Fall 2010), 52.
[94] Patillo, 5.
[95] The following quotations are taken from a group interview. Mr. Hlomgwa, Mr. Mncwabe, and Ms. Mkhze , group interview by author, Menzi High School, Umlazi, 21 April 2011.

strives to connect the present and past by reminding his learners of the continued existence of several organizations, asking who the president of the COSATU is and calling attention to the long-held post of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi over the Inkatha Freedom Party. Learners are reportedly stunned by these continuities and moved by the video footage of civic abuses committed under the apartheid government. Seizing the strategy of oral history for the purposes of education, learners are often assigned to ask their parents and grandparents about the events that were described in the classroom. While acknowledging the inquisitiveness of most learners under a classroom setting, Mncwabe admitted that most "don't know much" about history. "They were born after 1994. They are very young," he explains.

And according to these young people, a group of 12 learners, 5 girls and 7 boys, whose ages ranged from 15 to 18, not all parts of history were created equal.[96] In our 90-minute discussion, the "Shoot the Boer" song also surfaced as an example of the persistence of history, but held very different connotations for the learners than for their teachers. Overall, the learners seemed less comfortable drawing parallels between today's society and that of their parents. When Learner K brought up apartheid a possible reason for the lack of South African films on SABC 3, his comment was quickly silenced. Learner I spoke at length about how apartheid was a closed chapter and that there was more to South Africa than the story of Nelson Mandela. "We are reborn again. If you were reborn again, you would have forgotten what happened behind 1994." Learner K insisted that this was not true and the conversation unfolded as follows:

> **Learner K:** I think the last time I checked, almost every leader was in this Apartheid thing. Even now, if you look in the papers, Malema still singing about this "Shoot a Boer" thing. You know, this vision about Apartheid that people are trying to run away from.
> *(Wails from many of the other learners)*
> **Learner I**: He's bringing it back
> **Learner B**: He's old school.
> **Learner I:** You just reminded me of a poem I wrote a few days back. People lying to other people that they are being reborn. They call themselves a new South Africa. Take a newborn baby. A newborn baby does not anything about what happened in the past because he or she hasn't been taught. So if you make a new South Africa, you can't speak to what happened in the past. Yes, we have to know about the past in order for our future to be bright, but we can't just say, "I'm not going to greet a Boer" or "I'm not going to go to the funeral of the late Mr. Terreblanche."

[96] The following quotations are taken from a group interview. Learners A-K, group interview by author, Menzi High School, Umlazi, 21 April 2011

What can be gathered from these comments is that parts of history have a potentially deleterious consequence on the future of the nation. There is bliss in ignorance, worth in forgetting, and such a sentiment undermines the historical push of heritage preservation projects such as Ulwazi.

Nearly all learners agreed that personal histories and family histories, such as the memorization of ancestral lineage, were self-defining aspects of their personhood. Learners I explained this in eloquent, nearly poetic language:

> **Learner I:** For having a tomorrow, there has to be a today. So I can't be what I want to be without knowing where I come from. So I have to know the roots, so I can be a flower one day. Knowing my history is a part of who I want to be. So if I can't be who I am, then there is a problem behind my history.

Learner I offered the opposite opinion. Using the example of his brother, who "doesn't know about this father," but is nonetheless living a good life. He challenged the notion that without information about a person's paternal family, he or she won't succeed, and even suggested that separation afforded a freer lifestyle. For him and several other students, the value of history was proportional to how much value a person gave it and the degree to which he or she considered it meaningful.

With the relative importance of history in mind, as something that when ignored could potentially cease to exist, a handful of learners expressed uncertainty over which how much credence to give the people, places, and events of yesteryear. Throughout the discussion, learners debated the merit of indigenous customs. Learner E described with affection the traditionalism of his father, a science teacher by trade who sought out herbal remedies whenever afflicted with stomach pains. He also brought up the custom of girls not being allowed to wear pants, which elicited complaints from the female learners and a cry of "This is the 21st century!" Learner J described the personal dilemma that can result when history remains an obscure and unknown entity: an individual is dismissive of his ancestry, suddenly becomes "confused," and then wishes to know where his family came from. Interestingly enough, he suggested that moving forward was in a persons' best interest, stating, "In our culture, there is a saying that says 'Leave the past where it belongs.'" This social amnesia is not without consequence, however, and Learner B described the family disagreements and personal shame that arises when a person is

perceived to have forsaken his or her traditional roots. She conveyed as much in the following story:

> **Learner B**: I'm going to make an example of myself. It was Monday in class, a history period, and the teacher was calling out names [for attendance]. The teacher didn't recognize my surname. He asked me where I was from and where my farm was. I was confused. It was so embarrassing because I didn't even know where my farm is because I grew up in Pretoria. So I'm asking you guys if it's a good idea to go back to our mothers and grannies and ask where we're coming from, or we just move forward in life.

These divergent perspectives spoke to a conflict over the value of origins. Forgetting allows a person to leave the farm, move to the city, and achieve beyond the means of his or her family. There is a geographical dimension to cultural memory and the sense that rural areas are places where your individual needs are subsumed under traditional values. Learner K spoke of a rural/urban division and its correlation to individual achievement in the following statement:

> **Learner K**: In a family, we don't all become successful. We suffered from this thing of living in rural areas, so most people they move away from rural areas to urban areas to live a better life than the rural. So when a person gets to the urban areas, he forgets that he started in the rural areas.

Whether consciously or unconsciously, Learner K's statement – "we suffered from this thing of rural areas" – has a very real historical basis. Under the Group Areas Act of 1950, urban residential and business areas were rezoned for exclusively white occupation. Non-whites were reassigned to rural areas on the outskirts of major cities. Learner K's words reminded his peers of the forced removals of African people in KZN and by extension, the marginalization of Zulu tradition and culture. It is beyond the intent of this research to determine the prevalence of cultural tradition in rural areas. However, many of the learners testified to the fixed dichotomy between the rural/traditional and urban/modern based on personal experience and opinion. This calls attention to Ulwazi recruitment of fieldworkers from peri-urban and rural areas and demonstrates how the association between indigeneity and the periphery continues to influence 21st century thinking.[97]

[97] Learners A-K. Group Interview by Author. Menzi High School, Umlazi. 21 April 2011

Umlazi Reacts to Ulwazi

What interest then could these learns, all living in the urban township of Umlazi or central Durban, possibly have in the rural-driven content of the Ulwazi database? A lot it turns out. Though an early closing bell cut our time mercilessly short, signalling the Easter recess, the crash tutorial I provided was enough to peak the interest of most. Learner D even came up at the end of the discussion to ask for the URL of the Ulwazi website, saying that she "loved everything about history." Had there been more time, I would have wished to open up the floor for specific questions about the Ulwazi database and the philosophical complexities that accompany digital heritage projects. The overwhelming volume of new information, however, that I threw at the learners within 20 minutes left little time for such introspective processing. With 5 minutes to spare, Learner I embraced the use of digital technology to record culture, saying that if the Zulu community embraced technology, perhaps their culture would be made more familiar and acceptable for outsiders. He reasoned that non-Zulu peoples would benefit most from Ulwazi's content, stating:

> **Learner I:** It could be useful. If a majority of the people could get a hold of the media maybe they could…include one story. And maybe if they include one story, people can get to know South Africa better. And also the tourists can also be attracted by this amazing company and they will want to know more.

However, Learner I also contended that reading historical information wasn't nearly as exciting as hearing it spoken. He continued:

> **Learner I:** When they want to know more, they can be told to log on to www…or they can go out asking people because I know a lot of tourists like to hear information orally rather than to read it. The museums explain everything without you asking anybody. They'd rather go the museum than log on to the website. They want to get the oral information.

Learner J disagreed, arguing, "I think they should have it in books. Because our parents don't know everything and not everyone has access to computers and stuff.[98] Learner J considered books a more valuable source of indigenous knowledge than Ulwazi, leading one to believe that

[98] Learners A-K. Group Interview by Author. Menzi High School, Umlazi. 21 April 2011

perhaps Gcina Mhlope is correct in saying at the storytelling festival, "We are building a nation. Our bricks are books. Our cement is culture."[99]

Before the discussion ended, the learners were given a brief survey (Appendix D) asking them to identify which sources of information they would most likely turn to in order to understand cultural traditions. When tallied, the quantitative results matched the qualitative results. For question one, books, followed by the Internet, were considered the best resources for learning more about cultural traditions. For question 2, the libraries and rural areas were considered the best places to understand cultural traditions (Appendix E).

1) If you were interested in learning more about cultural traditions, where would you look? Tick all that apply.

SEE NEXT PAGE

[99] *Nozincwadi* 'Mother of Books' Book and Storytelling Festival. Informal Interview and Observation. Diakonia Centre, Durban. April 15-15, 2011.

_6_ Books
_1_ Family and/or Friends
_4_ Internet
_1_ Movies
_1_ Music
_0_ Pictures
_1_ Radio
_1_ Television
_0_ Video
_0_ Other (Please describe):

Which of the above is the most useful and why?

2) Where is the best place to understand cultural traditions? Tick all that apply.

_0_ At a ceremony or ritual
_0_ In church
_1_ In city areas
_1_ At a historical monument
_1_ At home
_3_ In a library
_0_ At a museum
_0_ At a performance (music, dance, etc.)
_3_ In rural areas
_2_ At school
_0_ Other (Please describe):

Which of the above is the most useful and why?

The outliers were attributable to the same student (e.g. the learner who selected "Family and/or Friends" for question 1 also selected "At home" for question 2). A survey that was particularly interesting, in which the student chose not to identify himself or herself, was "Indentified Survey #1." Though he or she selected "Family and/or friends" as the place he or she would look to learn more about cultural traditions, his or her words claimed that book a more "useful" resource, stating, "Books, because old people hardly talk about their history and they shouts at children when they ask." While family and/or friends were available at his or her immediate disposable, in this learner's opinion, they fell silent when asked to explain the events of the past.

Such data points to the very trend that Gcina Mhlope feared was becoming endemic to South African families: that technology was being consulted over the family as a source of information, advice, and entertainment. In Mhlope's phrasing, the traditional role of the *gogo* as the font of local knowledge is outmatched by the ultramodern convenience of "Granny Google." While neither of the history teachers objected to the incorporation of Ulwazi into their curriculum, Ms. Mkhze, an English-turned-Life Orientation teacher with an enormous admiration for Mhlope, considered Ulwazi's use of technology harmful. Claiming that the parents also had to be source of information, she relayed in vivid words the breakdown in

communication between familial generations and the ascending wall of silence between young and old. Her criticism of a dwindling family dialogue was portrayed as such:

> There is no communication. If you notice with your families, you can see that the mother is watching the news on TV, the kids are busy with their cell phones, one is busy with the computers somewhere else. They do not sit together as a family. And these parents who are busy watching this news, they are tired from work, they want to go and sleep after that. Do they know what is happening to their kids? When will they have time to give information from what they have learned have parents to share with the kids? There is no talking. In the morning bye, bye. In the afternoon. Watch the news. Back to bed.

When it came to disciplining children, she spoke adamantly about the lessons that could be gained from a *gogo's* story about teen pregnancy – through narrative, metaphorical disaster - as opposed to the direct admonishment of a worried mother to stay away from boys. Stories called upon different skills of their listener and speaker, for when read aloud, stories demanded the listener be actively engaged. "They will learn to listen," she remarked, and praised the heart-rending power of a good oral tale. "It raises some emotions, some feelings within you. Because it makes you stop and think about your experiences." When teaching English, Ms. Mkhze made a concerted effort to incorporate a storytelling unit into the learner's education. After explaining this, she promptly instructed me to close my laptop and handed me one such lesson book opened to a Kenyan folktale called "The Magic Stone." "Read the stories girl," Ms. Mkhze implored. "Read the stories."[100]

[100] Mr. Hlomgwa, Mr. Mncwabe, and Ms. Mkhze, group interview by author, Menzi High School, Umlazi, 21 April 2011.

Conclusions

Overall Conclusions

Through the accumulation of various strains of information and insight, it can be concluded that the "digitisation" of heritage that is becoming the predominant trend of cultural salvation projects cannot represent oral traditions in their full integrity. By virtue of its placement in a new context, the text changes. To even conceive of there being a truly "authentic" version of an oral text negates the very fluidity that makes storytelling such a dynamic and downright enjoyable activity (simply ask Gcina Mhlope). However, the process of oral history research allows Ulwazi to come through on its promise of reawakening traditions from the dusty shelves of memory through the facilitation of community dialogue. The act of the oral interview strengthens intergenerational bonds that would otherwise have weakened and facilitates conversations that would otherwise not be shared. Sbo and Nellie, two of Ulwazi's fieldworkers, found personal satisfaction in their work. Though they approached the research in different ways, each did so out of the utmost respect for the person whose knowledge was being shared.

As an effort to record indigenous knowledge, the Ulwazi Programme finds itself situated in a paradigm of "living history" with a two-fold mission: to recover the indigenous knowledge of the local community and reawaken the community's interest in this prescribed body of knowledge. It is a prevailing tension of the programme. Does Ulwazi protect "traditional" culture and guard a treasure trove of already existing indigenous valuables? Or does it delineate culture as belonging to a certain group of people, stuffed into a hermeneutically sealed, digital package and labeled "Zulu" to the exclusion of other cultures and contemporary influences (e.g. poverty, disease, market forces)? The latter may be more prevalent than current management is comfortable admitting. In the process of fieldwork, contributors to Ulwazi decide what portions of yesteryear constitute what Michael Chapman describes as "usable past"[101] and survive beyond their historical instance as something of value in the 21st century. Ulwazi cannot simply transcribe all the memories of the elders, but must chose among the elders and moreover, chose certain memories from certain elders. The past and present become two sides of the same coin, in that Ulwazi must abide by what local leaders, programme fieldworkers, support staff, the eThekwini

[101] Michael Chapman, "The Problem of Identity: South Africa, Storytelling, and Literary History," *New Literary History* 29, no. 1. (Winter 1998): 85, http://www.jstor.org/stable/20057469

Municipality, and its online followers consider "worthy" of documentation. The result is a selective orality, one that screens for particular pieces of information and casts the total social context to the hinterlands.

Furthermore, in reading the indigenous knowledge back with fresh eyes, oral traditions become didactic in ways that might perk the ears of a tourist or medical doctor, but disinterest members of the community. Users of the Ulwazi "Community Memory" database do not gain all the rich, meandering detail that comes with conversation, the interaction that comes with a storytelling festival, or the imperative to focus, listen actively, and reciprocate. Listening to one's elders requires patience and appreciation of how the story is told. There is time enough to get to the "point" of the story and unlike a website, a child cannot open another tab of conversation when bored by how slowly a story is loading. This is not to say that Ulwazi's information is of lesser value than that of a *gogo*, but that the two are not interchangeable with one another. The Internet is comprehensive, broad, content-based, and anonymous. Oral tradition is rich, deep, performance-based, and social. Ulwazi is a hybrid between these two forms. It universalizes the specific by allowing one story/one community to speak to an entire subject. A way to correct this would be for Ulwazi to acknowledge where the stories come from, giving credit where credit is due, and reading the contextual information lost in the transcription process. As is true of almost all the articles on the Ulwazi database, the English/Zulu summary is not a direct translation. Undoubtedly, a great deal of information is lost and a huge improvement to the model would be translations that are word-for-word. Instead of brief summaries that glaze over crucial details, direct translations would allow users to have greater access to the nuances of the story as it was originally told.

The catalogue of the indigenous library, software requirements, and input of management heavily affect the Ulwazi model. At times, the community's participation appears deferential to the requirements of the superstructure. One suggestion for the future of Ulwazi would be to make the process more democratic by allowing fieldworkers to write stories on any topic of their choosing, including one's of a politically sensitive nature. The inclusion of political doctrine would not tarnish the impartial nature of the database, but add to its richness and fully reflect the community's present needs and wants.

When all is said and done, the Ulwazi Programme does render a fundamental service. Evocative of library movements throughout history, it is clear that through the Ulwazi

Programme, the eThekini Municipality is endeavoring to tackle major social issues, such as heritage loss, familial disintegration, and unemployment, on a micro level. Though the process isn't perfect, it nonetheless captures information that would otherwise be lost to the sands of time and the library is well chosen in this capacity. Libraries are stewards for the betterment of the community and keeping with the tradition of the library on Robben Island, serve the dual purpose of reminding the public where they come from and assisting them in where they wish to go. The Ulwazi Programme has the potential to become a guardian of a region's intellectual life. In its current manifestation, flaws and all, it achieves this goal with incontestable success. The Ulwazi database provides access to educational, cultural, and historical information, promotes a culture of literacy and life long learning, and dictates information provision and management. These are critical functions whose social repercussions should not be underestimated.

Recommendations for Further Study

One of the major drawbacks to this study was its failure to determine who was accessing Ulwazi's content, how, and for what purpose. For a researcher more computer saavy, and less anthropological, it might be interesting to prowl Ulwazi's Google Analytics document for page traffic information and calculate which topics received the most hits. Perhaps the IP address can be traced back to a region and patterns uncovered that describe which types of indigenous knowledge the areas of KwaZulu-Natal are most interested in. This might assist the Ulwazi Programme in better catering to the needs of the local community by taking user interests into account when hiring fieldworkers from different communities. Right now, the fieldworkers and participating community members drive the "community participation" component of the model. It would be worthwhile to investigate, in a manner more conclusive than visiting a local high school, what the public at large thinks of the project.

The future of Ulwazi appears to be heading in several new directions. The eThekwini Municipal Library Services is in the process of hiring an indigenous knowledge librarian who will make Ulwazi his or her full time commitment. This upcoming spring, the current project leader will be pilot an application that will allow Ulwazi to be accessed through a mobile phone and contributions incentivized through airtime dispensation. And as made evident by the interest at Menzi High School, there is potential for Ulwazi to make a valuable contribution to public

education in South Africa. Research into any one of these new developments would be a fruitful venture.

Finally, a dimension of the research that is unrelated to the subject of oral tradition, but nonetheless cropped up repeatedly, was the perspective of the emerging "born-free population." The knowledge being stored by Ulwazi and published by Mhlope is intended for them and it would be fascinating to examine in earnest detail the relationship of born-frees to the historical baggage of South African history.

Final Words

While bringing this research to fruition, I came across the story of a man named Kas Maine, who kept hidden a collection of 850 documents and scraps of paper from various periods of his life in two large garbage bags. [102] Though the most rudimentary form of archiving, it is nonetheless emblematic of the desire by human beings to have their life narratives and personal histories remembered. Underscoring the buoyancy of oral tradition is a fear that the tradition will fall on deaf ears and like a tree falling without sound in a forest, there are no stories to be told if there are no people to listen. Listening gives dignity to the human voice and so long as there are people willing to honour this dignity, to gather in a circle, and like Mazanendaba, press a shell to their ear, oral tradition will continue to course through the landscape of human life.

[102] Keith Breckenridge, "Orality, Literacy & the Archive in the Making of Kas Maine," *Oral Literature & Performance in Southern Africa*, ed. Duncan Brown, (Oxford: James Currey Publishing, 1999), 138-146.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ulwazi Database – Culture

Category Culture

Sub-Category 1	Sub-category 2
Arts (Ezobuciko)	Dance (Ukudansa); Drama (Umdlalo wasesiteji); Music (Umculo); Painting (Ukupenda); Poetry (Izinkondlo/imilolozelo)
Craft (Umsebenzi wezandla)	Beadwork (Umsebenzi wobuhlalu); Grasswork (Umsebenzi wotshani); Jewelery; Photography (Umsebenzi wokuthalha izithombe); Pottery (Ukubumba); Sculpture (Ukuqopha amatshe); Tapestries (Izindwango zemifakenliso); Wirework (Umsebenzi wocingo); Wood Carving (Ukubaza)
Education (Ezemfundo)	Schools (Izikole); Educationist (Umfundisi); Historic Schools (Izikole ezinemilando); University (Inyuvesi)
Entertainment (Ezokungcebeleka)	Dance (Ukudanso); Music (Umculo)
Games (Imidlalo)	Indigenous Games (Imidlalo yomdabu)
Language (Ulimi)	Afrikaans (isiBhunu); Durban Slang; English (isiNgisi); Languages from the Indian Sub-continent (Izilimi zaseNdiya); Township Taal (isiTsotsi); Zulu (isiZulu)
Media (Ezokusakaza)	Film (Imibukiso yebhayisikobho); Magazines (Amabhuku); Newspapers (Amaphephandaba); Radio (Umsakazo); Television (Umabonakude); Websites (Amawebsites)
Projects (Amaphrojekthi)	
Religion (Ezenkolo)	Catholic (AmaKhatholika); Christian (AmaKrestu); Churches (Amabandla); Hindu (AmaHindu); Judaism (AmaJuda); Mosques; Muslim (AmaSulumane); Shembe (AmaNazaretha); Synagogues (AmaSinagoge); Temples (AmaThempeli); Tamil (AmaThamili)
Societies	Religious Societies (Izinhlangano zezenkolo)
Sport (Imidlalo)	Golf (Igalofu); Rugby; Running (Ukugijima); Soccer in Durban (Ibhola lezinyawo eThekwini); Tennis (Ithenisi);Chess
Stories (Izindaba)	Children's Stories (Izindaba zezinganę); Fairy tales (Izinganękwane); Legends (Izindaba zasendulo); Personal Histories (Imilando ngabantu); Witchcraft (Ukuthakatha)
Traditional Ceremonies (Imicimbi yesintu)	Marriage (Umshado); Death (Ukufa); Coming of Age (Ukukhuliswa); Traditional Beliefs (Izinkolelo zesintu)
Traditional Customs (Amasiko esintu)	

Appendix B: Ulwazi Database – History

Category Environment

Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2
Agriculture (Ezolimo)	Crops (Okulinywayo); Farming Techniques (Izindlela zokulima)
Animals (Izilwane)	Farm animals (Izilwane ezifuyiwe; Snakes (Izinyoka)
Community Development (Intuthuko yomphakathi)	
Food (Ukudla)	Hindu Food (Ukudla kwamaHindu); Indian Food (Ukudla kwamaNdiya); Zulu Food (Ukudla kwamaZulu)
Health and Medicine (Ezempilo nemithi)	Traditional Medicine (Imithi yesintu)
Home (Ikhaya)	Home Duties (Imisebenzi yasekhaya); Girls Duties (Imisebenzi yamantombazane); Boys Duties (Imisebenzi yabafana)
Indigenous Plants (Izitshalo zemvelo)	Alien Plants (Izitshalo zokufika); Indigenous flowers (Izimbali zemvelo); Indigenous trees (Izihlahla zemvelo); Magical plants; Medicinal plants (Izitshalo ezelaphayo)
Landscape	Beaches (Ulwandle); Dams (Amadamu); Estuaries (Izinzalo zemifula/iziphethu); Geology; Hills and Mountains (Amagquma nezintaba); Marine Life (Impilo yasemanzini); Marine/Aquatic Life (Izilwane nezitshalo zasemanzini); Rivers (Imifula); Valleys (Imihosha); Waterfalls (Izimpophoma)
Living Environment (Indlela yokuphila)	
Local Business (Ibhizinisi lomphakathi)	
Local Government (Ululumeni wasekhaya)	Courts (Izinkantolo)
Biodiversity	
Map (Ibalazwe)	
Places (Izindawo)	Cato Manor (Umkhumbane); Churches (Amabandla); City of Durban (Idolobha laseThekwini); Durban Heritage Sites (Izindawo zamagugu eThekwini); Durban North (Inyakatho yeTheku); Highway Area; INK; Museums (Izindawo zemilando); Rural areas (Izindawo zasemaphandleni); South Durban Basin; Townships (Amalokishi); Valley of Thousand Hills
Projects (Amaphrojekthi)	
Sustainability (Okuthuthukiswayo)	
Tourism (Ezokuvakasha)	
Trade (Ukuhweba)	

Appendix C: Ulwazi Database – Environment

Category History

Sub-category 1	Sub-category 2
Communities (Imiphakathi)	Clan (Isigodi); Clan Praises (Izithakazelo); Genealogy (Umlando ngomndeni); Surname (Izibongo)
Education (Ezemfundo)	Educationist (Umfundisi); Historic Schools (Izikole ezinemilando); Schools (Izikolej); University (Inyuvesi)
Events (Imicimbi)	Celebrations (Ukubungaza); Elections (Ukhetho); Wars (Izimpi)
Manufacturing & Industry (Ukukhiqiza)	
People (Abantu)	Activists (Abantu abasebenzela umphakathi); Actors (Abalingisi); African people (Abantu abansundu); Artists (Amaciko); Crafters (Ubucilko bezandla); Indian South Africans (AmaNdiya aseNingizimu Afrika); Musicians (Abaculi); Writers (Ababhali); History of Surnames (Umlando wezibongo)
Places (Izindawo)	Cato Manor (Umkhumbane); Churches (Amabandla); City of Durban (Idolobha laseThekwini); Durban Heritage Sites (Izindawo zamagugu eThekwini); Durban North (Inyakatho yeThekwini); Highway Area; INK; Museums (Izindawo zomlando); Rural areas (Izindawo zasemaphandleni); South Durban Basin; Townships (Amalokishi); Valley of Thousand Hills
Political History (Umlando wepolitiki)	Apartheid (Ubandlulula); Boer War (Impi yamaBhunu); Colonial Times (Izikhathi zeKoloni); Indian Community (Umphakathi wamaNdiya); Local Government (Uhulumeni wasekhaya)
Projects (Amaphrojekthi)	
Transportation (Ezokuthutha)	Bus and Taxi Industry (Amabhasi namateksi); Harbour (iTheku lemikhumbi); Motorways (Imigwaqo); Railways (Ojantshi); Aviation (Ezamabhanoyi)
Traditional medicine (Imithi yesintu)	Traditional Healing (Ukwelapha ngesintu); Traditional Healers (Abelaphi bendabuko)

Appendix D: Menzi High School Student Survey

Menzi High School – Focus Group

Please answer all the questions as honestly as possible. Your participation in any and all parts of this survey is voluntary. The information will remain confidential and will be stored in a safe manner at all times in a place to which I alone have access. The report based on this survey *will not disclose your name*.

Questions for Learner	
What is your name?	
How old are you?	
Are you male or female?	
What is your grade?	
Where do you live?	
Which ethnic group, if any, do you consider yourself?	
What languages do you speak and where do you speak each one (at home, school, etc.)?	

3) If you were interested in learning more about cultural traditions, where would you look? Tick all that apply.

__ Books
__ Family and/or Friends
__ Internet
__ Movies
__ Music
__ Pictures
__ Radio
__ Television
__ Video
__ Other (Please describe):

Which of the above is the most useful and why?

4) Where is the best place to understand cultural traditions? Tick all that apply.

__ At a ceremony or ritual
__ In church
__ In city areas
__ At a historical monument
__ At home
__ In a library
__ At a museum
__ At a performance (music, dance, etc.)
__ In rural areas
__ At school
__ Other (Please describe):

Which of the above is the most useful and why?

Appendix E: Menzi High School Student Survey

Learner A:

- 18, male, 12th grade, Umlazi
- Culture: Black, African
- Languages: Zulu at home, English at school
- 1) Books and Internet; "Internet, because internet tell you exactly what you had search about it don't delay"
- 2) In city areas, in a library, at a performance, at school; "In the city areas, because it is where you meet different people from different ethnic groups"

Learner B:

- 15 years old, Female, 10th grade, from Durban
- Culture: Black, African
- Language: Zulu, English, Afrikaans, Sotho
- 1) Internet; "The internet because it has no limit to the information it provides and the are always alternative website if the website you are tuned into doesn't have enough info"
- 2) In school; "School because the teachers are older and have experience some of the problems I might have"

Learner C:

- 16 years, female, 10B, Umlazi
- Culture: African
- Language: Isizulu, English
- 1) Books; "Books because everything is written there"
- 2) In a library; "School because that is where you mostly get taught about traditions"

Learner D:

- 17, female, 10th grade, Umlazi
- Culture: African
- Language: IsiZulu (at home), Sotho (at home), English
- 1) Internet; "Because technology has become advanced so internet has every info you can learn about cultural traditions"
- 2) In rural areas, "Because in rural areas that is where culture started with the King uShaka he lived in a Royal House situated at a rural area"

Learner E:

- 17, male, 10th grade, Umlazi
- Culture: Unspecified
- Language; Zulu at home, English at school
- 1) Internet; "Family—it is a reliable resource"
- 2) In a library, at a museum: "Library more and more information is being given out with access to books and internet"

Learner F:

- No survey returned

Learner G:

- No survey returned

Learner H:

- 15 years, male, 10th grade, Umlazi

- Culture: Zulu
- Language: Zulu at home, English at school
- 1) Family and friends; “Its family because they would not be against us they would support us”
- 2) At home; “At home because I would understand culture well”

Learner I:

- No survey returned

Learner J:

- No survey returned

Learner K:

- 19 years, male, 11th grade, Umlazi
- Culture: Zulu
- Languages: Zulu, Xhosa, English
- 1) Books, Internet, Movies, Music
- 2) At a ceremony or ritual, in church, at a performance, in rural areas; “Rural areas is where culture still resides in nowadays and its where its started”

Learner L:

- 19 years, male, 12th grade, Umlazi
- Culture: Zulu
- Language: Zulu at school
- 1) Books, internet, movies, radio, television, video
- 2) At a historical monument, in a library, at school

Unidentified survey #1

- 1) Family and/or friends; “Books, because old people hardly talk about their history and they shouts at children when they ask.”
- 2) N/A

Unidentified survey #2

- 1) Books
- 2) In rural areas